

Surtr's Path

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Summary: 3 years after HTTYD, 3 years before HTTYD2, Hiccup is reaching his 17th birthday. As rite of passage he plans a Journey up to where J rmungandr traces the World's Edge. His father, his tribe and his friends hold different expectations  Events from HTTYD2 might be happening ahead of their time, or very differently or not at all. Nonetheless, Valka and Drago Bludvist are out there.

## 1. 1 The Hideout

"Ouch!"

A thunderous flap and a whiff of fish greeted the small patch of land in front of the ruins as a figure stumbled on the ground. The booted foot tried to give way to the momentum but the peg leg, shiny and hook-shaped, slid through and let the teen fall on a pile of autumn leaves. The body barely made a sound but a nudge on its hips forced out an reflective grunt.

"I'm O-kay!"

Hiccup made the contraption on his left foot clink and tinkle until the hook was replaced with a slightly differently bent piece, then stood up in three paused breaths while learning the pain of all his sore spots.

"Now I can fly too, see?" He smiled at the dragon.

Toothless, disbelief settling in his eyes, turned his head and cocked a sneer before looking at Hiccup's sides almost with contempt in its face.

"Yeah, I know. I miscalculated the strap's length "

Toothless' beady eyes were not soothed yet.

"and my leather wing slipped away in mid flight"

Not yet.

"turning me into a human pinwheel and I would have died had I not rocked into your side and, Yes, You saved Me. Again. Thank You. Alright Now?"

Toothless blurted a grunt himself and fell on the leaves seemingly asleep but obviously annoyed.

Hiccup hesitated and slowly said "It will work, Bud, it just needs perfecting, that's all. I'm sorry for the crash, okay?" as if Toothless even felt it! Hiccup on the other hand could barely touch his own shoulder "Would you have preferred we stayed home and watched the Dragon Races?"

Toothless shot open an eye at him.

"Really?" Hiccup was fairly surprised. "Just watching or participating too?"

Toothless held the stare.

"Really? I don't see the point. I bet it's all pride with you."

Toothless closed the eye but not completely, just to give Hiccup a reason to assess his next words carefully, which he did.

"I mean, why would you care? We're faster than anyone. I'm not even being smug how many times have the Twins or Astrid or those younger hooligans tried to follow us? They can't last to the nearest Horizon. We are faster even without trying. I think this whole thing with you is the same prideful stuff you do with the fish at dinner or with my leather wings."

Toothless was rather unresponsive today but as always gave the feeling of understanding every little meaning behind each comma.

"Alright, I know it's a close fight in those Dragon Races, they might beat us. When it comes to urban flight steep curves and small round runs are just made for smaller dragons, it's not like we can plow the town to the ground to win"

Toothless' eye opened enough for Hiccup to add "and I'm just saying, don't get any strange Ideas."

Hiccup seated himself at his side and said "Remember what we're doing this all for. We've bigger plans. We'll see J̥rmungand and scratch its back and lurk past the edge of the World and stalk down the endless waterfalls and if we get to climb the branches of Yggdrasil all the better. I bet one sky is too small for us."

Then he felt stupid because those few words were not worth sitting himself down for getting back up again a moment later. All the bruises ached and twinged loudly like an harp's cords under a hammer, so he stood on his feet as still as a statue, waiting for the strings

to go quiet again.

The island they had landed on was one of many. In fact there was a whole freckled coast of it from the sky, small columns sprouting from the deep sea up to a small gulf of a bigger island like a comet and its tail. The bigger island was named Axeli, it had a couple of mountains and a known town on its other side, the small islands instead had no names except some on the borders that might bore the name of people and ships that died against their cliffy sides. These islets were covered in trees like big fungi and their edges drew too close to each other to allow any navigation whatsoever in between. Their cliffs steep enough to make the top uninhabitable or unreachable without flight and their fauna maid mostly of birds with some lonely squirrel having to live on a patch of a hundred trees if he was among the lucky ones.

Yet, somehow, on top of one Hiccup had found ruins, not even common ruins because they looked like a fortification cut short at its edge like the sea had swallowed the missing parts. To the best hypothesis he could develop the Nest wasn't the only place with dragons \_that Big\_ and maybe in this place it had taken place a stamping match. Another theory involved Gods and Otherworldly Ire which, to Hiccup's knowledge, was better left unthought as the Gods might just find themselves obliged of thinking back at you.

The whole island was about two hundred feet across on its widest breadth, filled with a solid forest except for that small clearance where the ruins reached the Northern edge but trees were all along the border and grew even on top of the sloped roof of the ruins. The winds had dragged earth everywhere and trees of these islets liked to keep everything they got by chance from a storm.

A system of wooden drainpipes led the rainwater to a trough but Hiccup (who made them) still carried drinking water with him from home since the trough and the gutters had started developing miniature life forms of their own.

From the outside the covert chimney was not more distinguishable from any other weird extrusions of rotten wood and sculpted stone on the bed of grass that only Hiccup, Toothless and a rather reckless and curious squirrel had come to appreciate as a ceiling.

What was inside was Hiccup's secret hideout, a scrawny sickly place where rust would never starve, where leather would rot unseen in failed semblance of futuristic armor, where Toothless' '\_Hall of Fame for Biggest Fish-Heads Caught Yet\_' was taking shape finely alongside a wall, where all things that Hiccup was not ready to say to his father nor anyone else on Berk were melted, forged and molded into creative things that could keep the secret Hiccup could not easily hold: he wanted to see the World.

Such a big desire planted in the heart of that tiny island, hoping to bud against the adversities, sometimes he felt like he was making his own roots when he could just fly away! For that ( and for the fact that the island was shaped like a big Goblet or a bowl on a spike of stone nailing it to the sea) Hiccup had named the island: Berth-Cup Island. Cup like a cup, berth likeâ€¦ well, he really had to go away, either being docked here or Berk, it hardly made any difference if he didn't plan seriously to leave it behind. Not forever, just for a few weeks. Rightâ€¦|

One day he'll start his journey, setting forth from a port like every viking that ever lived (before a dragon's wings became an option) and his Hideout island was port enough in his dreamful eyes.

Even when dragons' raids made warriors out of any of Berk's children, as they reached their teens the elders would still kick them on a boat and set them forth Adventure of one kind or another. There was a lot out there and tradition said one should be sent by the Spring before their 18th year birthday so they'd learn that tiny bit about the world required for boys to turn into men.

17 years old, Hiccup was a month away from that milestone and thenâ€¦ and then he'll just have to wait for the snow to melt and the fish to start filling the known shores, those were the signs in the olden days but he might even ignore them. On top of Toothless would it even matter if the icy ground or the fierce sea disagreed with him? From now on it would be the Sky and the Sky alone.

But those were just small thoughts harbored by a mind on edge, Hiccup's doubts had their own weight and their own scales and sometimes he felt his obligations as a Chief's son would never win the overwhelming winds of change. He had set the sails on for that change to happen and now he was going to be the first to be dragged along with the Stormâ€¦ Dragons!

Dragons could now fit most of Berk's daily life quite well which, for Stoick the Vast, meant it was high time they should be introduced into Politics too. With a much larger slice of humanity at stake, things had rocked back and forth among the tribes, uniting the fearful, parting tides of people, mincing the old traditions, betraying the sacred valuesâ€¦ a mess that started to pivot around the only certainty: the Hero of the Battle against the Red Deathâ€¦

"What. A. Mess." Hiccup blabbered as he moved away from Toothless, his footing now secure and his mind finding the motivation he needed every single time he stepped on Berth-Cup Island. He could bring the greatest anticipation possible for some idea he was going to shape in the hot coals of the hearth butâ€¦ one moment to think about the Journey ahead was spared every single time.

The ruins had collapsed more and more during the past months, Hiccup's fault of course, and they now slouched their remaining roof to the ground where a narrow arc of stone with wooden planks shoved below seemed to hold them in place. The planks were a door and a tricky one at that, it would remain closed for anyone who didn't know about the subtle iron hook on its frame. Hiccup moved it and entered the first big room, in the right corner he could gladly notice the summer had made him taller than the lowest side of the room although now he would be prone to head bumps. A great deal of work had gone into securing the roof in place, all around. Flimsy hands with tiny strength and lots of time had worked an engineering miracle to avoid being swallowed by the weight overhead and it showed in the many thin poles jointed and enclosed in iron belts to make each single pillar.

The ground was covered with flat stones and an assortment of rejects and failures of Hiccups' imagination. There were shields leaning on the wall and one on the ground, made by plating Toothless' scales,

which had suffered heavily to playful bites of a sleepwalking dragon's jaw during his naps. Swords were piled on the lowest corner, some too old to be made in this novel forge but still bearing recent scars in missing pommels and cross-guards. Between the door and the swords, of course, a line of fish-heads-trophies getting too long for the room. Three axes with fine details shaped in them were the only things that had been hung for show, they were on a wall on the right and they gave a feeling of evolution, like each had been born from perfecting the previous one.

A box of twigs would reveal to anyone who came closer a great deal of wood cut in unseemly shapes to probably resemble pieces of bows, several horns of dragons cleaned and whetted by the sea and retrieved by Hiccup made a smaller pile on its side recording the unsuccessful time spent in trying to replicate a composite bow that had made its way to Berk through a great deal of trade and plunder.

Sands and powders in sacks, rare ores, bundles of leather and some more useless scraps made for another pile on the left corner away from the entrance, some covered with more care than others by ragged cloths or more planks of wood and leftovers of the second floor's collapsed roof.

The pile of junk in the first room would pale in comparison with the one in the room just ahead.

This was boarded with more wooden planks and some huffing and puffing echoed the effort of removing them with one hand, Hiccup's right side still being a bundle of pain. Where the previous room had almost a square frame this had the shape of a long slice of pie bitten at its pointy end and with a doorway on the side at its thickest point. A large opening that might be called a window was on the furthest edge of the slice immediately on the left of the entrance, the boards of wood closing it slid open by a single kick on a pulley and they showed a small patch of grass below. Another closed fissure opened to a window that took the whole opposite narrow wall where the room met the irregular cliff of the island, only waves rushing below. That side was shadowed by a big yew tree that clang to rocks above and whose roots made for a whole wall of the room and several improvised crossing beams now clouded with many hanging tools. Overall both windows offered almost East to West orientation to the place which made for an ever-changing but steady illumination. Some beeswax candles here and there gave more hope of a lived place but sometimes Hiccup was forced to go outside for any precision work if the sky was too cloudy or the fire had made it all too hot in that little stove of a place. A giant rock had been carved in to make the hearth and the forge and it lay in the middle of an opening between the two rooms. The only hinged panel of all the rooms was there and with a push it swung open giving Hiccup a complete view of his Hideout.

The little room had many bows on the little band of wall between entrance and the larger window, not even one of them would fire straight when stringed but they sure looked well-made. The long wall of yew roots was tapestried with blueprints and some suit of leather here and there nailed among the sketched paper, a sack of coal on the corner, bellows and tools here and there. The stone of the Hearth thinned and went as far as the door creating a large table to work on and leaving space for the legs to fit in, albeit still plenty uncomfortably. On top of it, on a corner, Hiccup had turned a flat mass of steel into his own anvil to hammer the metal into shape.

Above the table, hanging on the wall were a lot of swords, his pride and glory, all prototypes and failures of a curious concept that almost had blown up the whole hideout: a Sword made of fire.

He put on black leather gloves, smiled proudly at the sight of his swords and unsheathed his best prototype yet from his side, put it in the hearth, threw some coals and then, hiding the rest of his body under the stone, he clicked the cross-guard with his left hand's thumb where it would release the Hideous Zippleback's oily saliva and waited for the returning click which would \_supposedly\_ lit it.

A burst of heat engulfed the bowl of coals and the ceiling and, possibly, Hiccup imagined a tongue of fire licking the outer room and he hoped, really hoped, the natural dampness of the place would suffice to prevent a wide-spread fire. The sword was on fire, yes, but for Hiccup the whole Fire-Priming ordeal was still a tad bit too close to an \_Explosion\_ to call it a Successful Working Prototype, there was still room for improvement and hopefully he wouldn't have to die to fill it.

The coals took a while but lighted up before the tang emptied out all the Hideous Zippleback's fuel in the hilt and Hiccup started pumping the bellows. He could ask Toothless for a breath of fire but that would entail to some more gratitude he was not so ready to hand out, especially with Toothless still not on board with the leather wings and all.

Nonetheless, Hiccup sat down and smiled at Toothless, whose head was crawling in the tiny room. If he were to enter he'd occupy the place entirely so he just let his body find comfort in the outer room while his head rested in full view of Hiccup, trying to keep company in what always turned out to be a long and tiring day at the forge. Autumn's first chills made it at least more bearable than the long heated summer but, for Hiccup, the Hideout was at its very best when under deep snow and Winter wasn't too far away, another thing to look forward to.

With time the coals turned blazing hot with a hint of a white core, by then a couple of empty pages of paper had filled with parts and names for the next project, a black leather jacket got another pocket stitched to its arm, one of the most promising prototypes was broken beyond repair by Hiccup's attempt at fixing it and an annoying bird, a Sky Lark perhaps, had hopped down the big window onto Toothless' head to look intriguingly at a working figure dressed in a thick brown-burnt apron.

Hiccup had a furnace on the clearing outside he used for smelting and he went there a moment to throw away some stones just handpicked from a big sack. That was the last chore of the day as he felt his mental clock sounding the call of glowing metal in the hearth. For few paces he only felt the sweat trickling down his face from the heat of the forge and the wind cool on his skin, then all his concentration went into avoiding slipping again on the fallen leaves, the sound of sizzling fuel in the fire sent him back to his whistling ears as he had crushed into Toothless and so he remembered the bruises still acting up under the clothes. All that made him completely unaware of a small shadow taking shape in the sky above.

In the tiny room the curious Sky Lark had relocated on to the ledge, still more curious than scared. Toothless' ears started twitching but

Hiccup regarded them as a simple reaction to his attempt at playing acrobat to enter without stamping on him. He went to the forge without a second thought but the dragon's ears and even the annoying bird had sensed a landing and a stealthy flutter of wings on the outside, the kind that makes a bird want to wait out the noise before flying away.

On the table a set of tools had been lined about, all had disappeared at some point from Gobber's workshop through Hiccup's newfound thieving skills and all had been blamed on wandering dragons and their talent to annoy people. '\_They obviously like to play with shiny things\_' Gobber had said and for that he had taken to calling them magpies, all on account of his apprentice's thievery.

One hammer found a steady grip around itself tighten as it was loaded in the air with all the power of a mighty sore shoulder. Hiccup was just readying to land the swing when the sound of a clearing throat reached him from the outside. The hammer fell off and the handle hit him on his head felling him down on his buttocks, back to the old pains with a new one added for the company.

A mocking yell from outside lashed inside Hiccup's already ringing skull "Yoo~Eh! Yeh all Scotch Pickle-Prunes in there! The Hairy Hooligans are here! Run for your lives because you're soo screeewwwd!"

The silence that followed sprang Hiccup up and into an indistinct whisper of curses, he led his legs right in front of Toothless and seeing him so unfazed almost brought forth the need to cannon-ball on the saddle but he knew better than thatâ€¦ he marched angrily, but cautiously, in the outer room looking for any free flagstones without a tail or a paw. When his eyes could trust his blind legs on the unencumbered pavement they fixated on the figure that barred the door.

"What in the name of Æ"Æ°r!"

"Oh my! I'm soâ€" sorry, Hiccup!" taunted again the voice "Am I not supposed to know about your secret baseâ€" on the kooky archipelagoâ€" of weird, creepy and loony?"

The sarcasm had no place in those wordsâ€¦ all the effort Hiccup put into reaching the island without being followedâ€¦ "No, You were not supposed to know, Astrid! No One was supposed to know!"

"Well, Lucky for you I'm the only one who found out!"

"Butâ€¦ how?"

"Color me clever but: I just followed youâ€¦" she said, throwing at Hiccup a brick of \_Obvious!\_.

"Color what? Hey! No you didn't, you couldn'tâ€¦ I mean, Stormfly can't keep up!"

"The mighty Night Furyâ€¦" she rolled her eyes, came in and petted the sleepy dragon feigning ignorance of all the clutter of stuff that was around her, even the fact that sound of dripping metal was coming from the forging station with a rising hiss of danger.

Hiccup ran on the side of the room that shared the hearth with his little lab and poked the second sword out of the fire with a crumpled stick of bronze before throwing that too among the heaps of rusted blades and pacing back to Astrid. She had harnessed the chance and was taking the whole room in with few calculated glances.

"You couldn't." Said Hiccup matter-of-factly.

"I could if I planned to, Sir Shrewd. Like, say, observe in what direction you disappeared to every other day and then just fly until I met the first island and wait for you there. You went past Cloffliff Island one week ago, so it had to be the next one, Axeli Island, not many eligible shores on this route." She said pointing behind her with her thumb. "But three days ago I couldn't see which one of islet among all the pebbles you landed on and you must have left after twilight because I lost you. Today on the other handâ€¦" she pointed at the coals.

Usually they didn't make much smoke and the wind dispersed it immediately but today the coals were dirtyâ€¦ and so were the swords he had meltedâ€¦ and maybe he had thrown some autumn leaves too many that had found their way in from windows or in the leather vestâ€¦ and some paper sketches that disagreed with himâ€¦ and a belt of his bracer ruined in the accidentâ€¦ and a piece of breadâ€¦ now, Really! Did he need just some minor bruising to turn uncaring towards anything and forget all his well-honed workplace habits?

\_Whatever!\_

Hiccup often forgot just how astute Astrid was. All the precautions he had taken went far beyond the superficial: even the fact that the island of Axeli was often visited by the more ship-oriented Viking tribes was in those calculations, he never approached before giving a sweep from the sky and then he did get to the island by flying lower than the small archipelago, dodging and zigzagging like a lightening bolt through a path no ship could have followed and, as for the landing, Toothless would keep to the Ruins' side, his wings never getting higher than the trees around. Only a Dragon Rider in flight would see him land but he was wary of that and looked up often enough.

The smokeâ€¦ that was something of a bother but even in the calmer days, between the yew three on top of the chimney and the wind, the smoke would be spotted only by people actively searching for itâ€¦

All his secrets behind a door jammed with one hundred locks and only needing one key to open them all: Astrid.

"Wait, you were waiting for me all day?" \_hadn't he been on Berth-Cup island for hours now? Did she wait until now on Axeli's island to spot the smoke or had she been in the small islet with him all day and he hadn't even noticed? But she did mention the smokeâ€¦\_

"No, pinhead, I just arrived. I was at the Dragon Races. Forgotten about them?"

"Ah. Ehmâ€¦ but you won, right?"



"Yeah." She said, one eyebrow arching.

"You always do." He smiled uncertainly.

"Do I? Ruffnut is just one victory behind me, we were 9 to 9 this morning. The '\_Showdown of the Century\_' according to bookmakers and bored people."

"Yeah, but, come on, all the others have no victories! and Ruffnut, well, does winning like that even count?" this time Hiccup could draw defenses and put a bit of spice in the answerâ€| after all he had just lost a secret Hideout.

"Fishleg has 3 victories, Snoutlout 4 and Tuffnut 6. Of course those were before those two started the courting and these days Tuffnut just tries to steal Ruffnut's 'gifts', easier game plan than risk the umpteenth tangled-neck accidentâ€|"

She let the words fade to invite a response but all she got was a frigid look and a spoonful of silence.

"You're angry with me?" she asked smiling quizzically. For Hiccup to expect sincere apologies or even a wounded kitten look was to completely forget who Astrid was in her core, so he just pounded for at least some taint of shame.

"Shouldn't I be?"

"No. I could have followed you before. Two years I let you go on with your mysterious ways but last time I did so it only took a few months before you changed the village forever, I'd rather not wait until you tip the world upside-down, thank you very much." Hiccup would have smiled if the head hadn't started drumming at the beat of his heart where the hammer's handle hit it.

"See?" she said. "It's just history repeating itself. I follow you. You show me what kind of future is coming crashing onto our lives. Fairest deal I can offer you."

Hiccup turned his back to her and put away the apron, the sturdy gloves, the frail and shaky pride. Then turned back.

"Let's go outside."

"What? But I want to see what all this is about!" she gestured around "I bet there's something cool in there! Is Baldr hiding in there smoking mistletoe? I wouldn't be surprised, I swear I wouldn't!" she kept pointing to the inner room.

"Come on, the stuff is just junk. You can go in there but you won't find anything good." He lied. One thing was losing a secret base, another was to spill out all the reasons why he needed one in the first place. Althoughâ€| this was Astrid, maybe she'd understand?

She ignored him and strode inside anyway only to see that really there were only weird swords of no functional appeal, a bit like the one Hiccup carried around these days, it just sprung out the outline of a badly designed sword that could probably be beaten apart with a broom. On the wall, sketchesâ€| she had been in Hiccup's home, no

surprise there. Leather armor thingies? Right enough to hide \_that\_, marriageable age meant the woman would carry her knitting set in the house, not the other way around. Then, on her left side, a tiny piece of wall between the entrance and the great window openingâ€| Bows!?

She turned around and then crawled on the ground laughing.

Hiccup \_totally\_ expected that, he really did.

To explain the depth to which a bow might label a person in Berk one must know that bows, sticks and stones are the weapons children are allowed to use before the parents deem them worthy of a real weapon. Hiccup had been barely tolerated with a knife even when he reached his teens, in fact until his father sent him to Dragon Training with 'The Viking Axe' ( \_"When you carry this Axe, you carry all of us with you!"\_, took him one week to lose itâ€|) he had never been entrusted with any weapon at all and it was really an hard prejudice to question. Case in point, the night he grounded Toothless he had been held responsible for so much of the mayhem in the village that, by the time it came morning, people had forgotten dragons had any talons in it too.

As bows stood, Hiccup had his own suspicions that even Berk's vikings on hunting expeditions on other islands carried bows stashed in their ships or, at least, made due with crossbows because only idiots would negate the advantage of a projectile weapon while hunting on land.

That was another thing, bows were toys and crossbows were legitimate, Berk had been on the Dragon standard for about long enough. Not fighting people for centuries had made them forget what a bow could doâ€| dragons can hardly be scratched by an arrow thrown by a bow, a good crossbow with steel arrows on the other hand might just find its way out the other side. But, in the end, that was what it all summed up to: Prejudices!

"There's no reason to laugh, You kill rabbits and gulls with bows, that's stuff you kill to eat. Not every weapon is there to chop heads or wings off." He said offended. He even meant it, though, he wasn't all that good with bows but he had captured dinner a dozen times ahead. He'd heard the stories, not all lands could be sailed around by boat, some tribes came from coasts on the east and those coasts were '\_Endless\_'. On a journey to the end of the world he might have to cross lands like those and then both him and Toothless would have to rely on his abilities to hunt and not on a dragon innate talent to fish. There was a thought that irked in the background: probably dragons could hunt boars as well as salmons since they had the ground advantage of initiating their attacks by simply cooking any prey aliveâ€| but that mattered not in Hiccup's mind, he could match Toothless at least on one aspect: Pride.

She stood up, still laughing a bit, her hands rubbing away tears and massaging her cheeks. He was already waiting outside but she just sat under the archway, it was a warmer day than usual and Astrid was wearing the furry clothes she used to ward off the high winds in flight. A good reason to hide from the sun.

Shadowsâ€| Hiccup sought them too although he'd been near hot coals for so long that even under the sun he felt his sweat cool

away.

"What did you call this island?" she asked looking around.

"Berth-Cup." At that point Hiccup spotted Stormfly on top of a big Oak cradling in a huge natural bowl made by branches. Those trees could only be seen past Axeli's Island and certainly not on Berk. Clofffliff Island, closer to Berk, had none of these trees but big wide woodlands filled with unending meaty prey so this archipelago of dotted rocks covered in fuzzy trees was mostly unknown to anyone who knew Hiccup, another reason to loathe the loss of secrecy. But as for dragonsâ€¦ he certainly had not seen any Deadly Nadders in the region, Stormfly was probably intent on testing the novelty with a napping experience.

Astrid had let him wander away in thought for a minute, then she said "Weird name. For an island, I mean. It sounds like 'Berk'â€¦ but not really. You should have called it Turtle-Dragon Island or Spiky-Buckler Island if you wanted to stitch up two random words. I would have called it Manure Island because it just looks like it from above. I bet it was the Red Death's droppings that made the whole archipelago in the first place."

"It's made of stoneâ€¦"

"You don't know everything about dragons, Hiccup! Especially \_That\_ Dragon! For all we knowâ€¦"

"Alright! Tell me why are you so surly and why are you here. That'll spare me the lecture when you'll say the door is low and the roof is crooked."

"Hiccup, the roof \_is\_ crooked. You know that, right?"

"Yes. The second floor's roof came down on it, now it's a ceiling made of a bit of both butâ€¦ it stands. That's what matters for me. Andâ€¦ It's not two years that I come here, a bit more than one, I think it was Autumn back then too."

She thought about it and then looked inside letting a large pause fall in the conversation. Hiccup lived of awkward pauses in conversations with everyone but Astrid (and possibly the twins) was the one that never seemed to notice them.

"Those axes on the wall, they look like mine. Like the one you gave me for my birthday."

"They wereâ€¦ failures. Yours is the fourth I made, those are not as good."

She looked back, somewhat mollified but her slight blush on the cheeks and her eyes made her look sulky, her tone of voice came out as she was on the brink of pouting like a child.

"Ruffnut is exasperatingâ€¦"

"I'm sorry I didn't come to see you beat her in the races, okay?"

"What? No, not for that. You should come anyway though, you know how people see you."

"Yeah, like some mystic kind of guy from one of the ancient Sagas." He meant to put sarcasm in those words but since there were already people writing poems about his fight at the Nest he felt rather scared to be boasting about it.

"Sort of. And you always disappear and make it all the more easy for them to imagine mystical machinations afootâ€| but our friends, they're not \_that\_ stupid, they think you're up to something, at least Fishleg thinks soâ€|" she said defensively and then added "â€"and me too. The others, though, even the younger think you're just acting weird or reclusive like you wereâ€" before, you know. Then Ruffnut saidâ€|"

"I don't care."

"You don't care being called Nuts?"

"Oh come on, both twins are Nuts, their name's a curse in itself. Then Ruffnutâ€| there were those two timesâ€| she was soâ€| clingy."

"Yeah, because she had a crush on you."

Hiccup felt awkwardly proud but they had had that conversation already and he bounced back in retort "And I don't care about that either and you know it."

"Why can't you just tell us?" her hands gestured uncertainly like what was around her meant something she could not completely grasp "We are your friends, Hiccup!" and there was no jealousy Hiccup could sense in dropping Ruffnut from the conversation, he \_could\_ have pushed her to see if she was jealous but Astrid could brandish shields and axes even in her own mind. He opted for trying to be cryptically honest.

"It's somethingâ€| I'd have to tell my father first and that's not easy."

"Are you going to leave?"

That surprised Hiccup in a big way, for a moment he saw Astrid as completely aware of everything. He had to shake his head to snap out of the bewilderment. "Iâ€| maybe. How do you evenâ€|?"

She was now brazenly pouting.

"I'm not blind, you know! You're always awayâ€| and where would you even want to go? Berk is your home, Hiccup. It's \_Our\_ Home." His heart clenched weirdly, like it had grown roots all around his chest and those had started thundering excitedly.

\_Right\_â€| \_She\_ thinks I'm going, like, Foreverâ€| She doesn't knowâ€| But She caresâ€| Our Homeâ€|\_

"You've the wrong idea, Astrid. I want to leave, yes, but on a journey like everyone did before the dragons, like they still do, with expeditions left and right. The whole Rite of Passage

tradition."

"You're notâ€¦| \_suited\_ to go on a warring expedition, Hiccup. You'll die." She had sprung up on her feet and her eyes fell unashamed towards his peg leg.

"I'm not going to a \_warring\_ expedition." \_But of course you would think of That!\_ "Not a fishing expedition. Not a hunting expedition. Not a pirating expedition." He mentally wondered if he had listed them all, most were accomplished on other Tribes' ships because Berk had lost his warring and pirating way along centuries of Dragons' Nest Expeditions and, especially warring, had been forgotten as a practice usually done against other tribes and enemies made of flesh and bones. Nonetheless all the quests filled the minimum requirements for the traditional Rite of Passage to 'Manhood', it didn't matter what tribes you braved them with.

He must have named all the possible expeditions because Astrid perplexed asked:

"What remains, Hiccup? You're going on a '\_Stitch and Decorate Expedition\_'?" she said taking hold of the leather vest he was still wearing, for all chores he'd done, he had never cared to change into something different than his winged prototype, his eyes lurked at his own side to see if he had strapped the wings at his torsoâ€¦| if they opened now that would lead to a whole bucket of questions and certainly troublesâ€¦| he planned to tell his father of his journey and that was it, he certainly didn't want him or anyone else to find out he might just spend some time flying solo with the air buoyancy of a chicken.

"I want to go on an \_Exploring\_ Expedition. It's old, Viking Tribes around don't do it anymore but I know it's there in the books somewhere. Heroes in stories went exploring all the timeâ€¦|" He struggled out of the grip when Astrid unclenched her fingers shocked by his answer. "And I'm not going away forever, maybe a month or two, but then I'd come back. Of course I'd come back." He said again more placatingly, realizing he'd started to yell.

She was wide-eyed but then composed herself into a frown of anger. "Alone?"

"Yeahâ€¦" Not! With Toothless, of course."

"Right!"

"Right!" He roared back.

"Your map! You've been charting the sea all around Berk anyway. Can't you make that be enough?!"

"I want to go farther!"

"Farther than Axeli's Island? What? The Endless Coasts? NÃ³regr? Or double back to Vinland maybe? Right! You'd die in a week, Hiccup!"

"Thank you for \_that\_! I'm not armless and I won't be unarmed andâ€¦| I don't need you to look after me like a child."

"But you are a child! Just listen to yourself! And youâ€¦" this time there was a bit of embarrassment in blatantly pointing out the leg but her vexation was charging ahead "You are a Cripple, Hiccup. There are giant Monsters worse than dragons and the people are Murderer outside our land. I don't want you to go! Not alone!"

Now that did it! Cripple! With the peg leg of his making he could outrun practically any of the more 'Viking' beefy adults in town and certainly he outran Fishleg any chance he got and probably Snotlout too if they got on good ground like the former arena, he could put more than a fair fight and Astrid knew it better than anyone! She was the one that forced him to train with her three times a week (albeit just with wooden swords). He could hunt and she didn't know that, Armhazard Ticklish the poacher had taught him five ways to prepare the kill and now he almost never threw up right afterâ€¦ He could fly with wings of his own making and his sword was made of (totally uncontrollable) Fire!

"I Will Go And That's It, Astrid. As soon as next spring comes, with or without my father's consent, and I'll go with Toothless, Alone! I've decided and you won't change my mind!"

She put herself right in front of him, Hiccup had had a growth spur during the Summer but she hit it before and better. Their noses matched in a sparring fashion but she was arching slightly down at him with bulkier shoulders and fluffier clothes. Both pair of eyes angry and belligerent but only one figure looked really threatening while any bystander might expect the other to roll down and play death. In spite of that Hiccup would not step down.

A black snout appeared with a yawn behind Astrid, woken up by being called up in the conversation twice now. The two battling noses broke up (in more than one way, Hiccup feared) and Astrid went towards the Oak tree where her ride was snoring in sync with the waves below. A whistle and a kick thawed a drowsy Stormfly down from the tree.

She jumped on and gave Hiccup one last feisty look that gave her the aura of a disgruntled Valkyrie, he did not try to walk away and stood there, looking for minutes at her silhouette in the sky until it fell beyond the horizon.

Time might have stopped for a while until Toothless rubbed against his back and the tension broke off.

"I really screwed it up this timeâ€¦ She will not look at me for the whole Winter, I'd bet on that. She might even try to follow usâ€¦ not that I worry about that." He smiled sadly at his friend and scratched his head in an half-felt hug. One of the many reasons why he would go alone was that for any other dragon it was a hard effort even to match the speed of a Night Fury sleepily gliding away and now he knew he might have to change direction a few times just to make it impossible to track him.

â€¦And what if he did accept companions! He'd have to wait for anyone to catch up to him and worse of allâ€¦ he'd have to ask if anyone wanted to come with him and half the village would agree in a blink, of course.

'Possibly Suicidal Journey to the End of the World?' Sign me in!

—

Deadly Quests had the same allure on Vikings that mermaids had on sailors, if Hiccup had been born in a different age he might have tried to instruct them on Darwinism or maybe just pointed out how willingly rising the stakes of natural selection wasn't all that clever. The Hunt for the Nest could have ended with the whole tribe wiped off charts and history books and what did they learn from it? Nothing, that's what! Not a single thing. If he told anyone where he was headed there would be a dark cloud of saddled dragons stretching in his wake. Of course there was no logic in making a patronizing lecture on the risk of the Journey if he didn't tell them in the first place, also the fact that he was first in line on that voyage might just make the words sound as empty as he heard them in his imagination, when he confronted his father with his real intentions. No, he'd handle that as he'd decided already.

Hiccup trudged in the forge and botched all the work that remained for the rest of the day among which, most annoyingly of all, were the changes he had thought up for the fire sword.

To begin with the sturdy fuller in 3 parts he made could not be added because he had miscalculated the lengths of the sections. He made a edged end for the sword quite like a bayonet many centuries ahead of its time although it could hardly be called revolutionary since it was at the end of a sword anyway. The tip used was from a thin sword and that fitted well enough but he could have used so many other swords' tips that were in the room and of far better iron and far sharper edges but his mind wasn't on the job.

The final result was unusual but to Hiccup looked beautiful. Any blacksmith would have fixated on the obvious lack of all the length of blade that should connect the dagger-end to the hilt. There, instead, were two skeletal lines of steel, three-times connected by even thinner steel and apparently this small frame could slide into the hiltâ€|

'\_That's no sword, Hiccup!\_' Gobber would have said and that was a thought that always made Hiccup smile. '\_Right! It's a sword like no other, that for sure!\_' \_he would answer.

With the modifications the sword would look just like a dagger until triggered into drawing itself out to its full length. The addition created the need for a sheathe of sort in which to put the short sword which since Hiccup still wanted to keep his usual knife strapped to his forearm's bracer. It would also take at least another day to make the devised fuller and to better carve the current tip so that the dragon saliva could drip to its end, forced by capillary action and by the gas pressure in the pommel. The bigger surface of spread of the saliva would hopefully work towards quelling the uncontrolled flame and once the fuller was added it might even give the sword enough strength to survive a single parry from a viking axe swung at him.

On a different day the work would have been judged barely acceptable, the sort Hiccup would rather put back in the hearth and do back from scrap but his row with Astrid had thoroughly unsettled his heart and mind. Above all, he wasn't ready to admit he was distressed at all for fear to back off the whole Journey idea so he nodded untruthfully to himself as he put the fire-sword dagger without a sheathe in his belt with the pointy end dangerously close to his thigh. For that he

made a mental note to not incur in any sort of accident or weird flying maneuver for the next couple of days.

He went out in the patch of grass but just sit there in the twilight, admiring the stars appearing in the ensuing smears of blueness in the sky. He started counting them as they looked so few but for every ten tally marks he mentally drew on his eyelids, far more winks flocked in the cloudy blanket. He yawned and slowly fell asleep, a scaly hide finding his back almost instinctively as he slid away from his sitting stance.

With more than a mind full of doubts Hiccup slept for the first time horizons beyond Berk, not in his bed and away from Home. He had always come back Home even if just for a couple of hours before sunrise, he had maintained the tacit assurance that his father would always find his room lived in every single day so he wouldn't worry.

This night, though, the sleep was not going to yield to self-appointed duties, it would last 'till needed and then Hiccup would wake up forgetful of the promises he made to himself, for a short while, at least. More things were bound to happen that night for Hiccup, small things, sitting on a tree by the moon and following a slow clicking sound that came with the tide. Hiccup would get to see Berk many hours from now, as a speck of glass reflecting back the sun at him and Toothless' shadow would be so big that the dreamy eyes of the Adventurer riding him would see it as the needle of a giant compass made of all Miðgarðr itself. Even Toothless would cherish the day ahead and it didn't matter that on his back there was a second weight, kicking and struggling— some times you met new people in all kinds of original ways—

Far above the Night was riding out the Day.

Nátt soared the sky and smiled benignantly at her daughter, Jǫrð, cradle of life in Miðgarðr, and all Earth mirrored her Mother's pale darkness with a thousands tones of her own as they dried of the light of day. Among the hundreds shades of ruby! and jade! and azure! Nátt spotted the pair of souls sleeping under the stars: one was dyed of a darkness that made the Goddess blush in delight, the other one was tiny and snuggled in that puddle of scaly gloom with wings and the sight stole from Nátt a kind and twinkling smile. Then every detail of the boy winked back at her from afar, the Night's smile disappeared and the wind rose up, high above the trees, as Hrímfaxi, the horse she was riding, started taking up speed because a weight on his back had disappeared.

Hiccup and Toothless slept through the changes, clouds leaping like rabbits in snowy fields leaving behind big arched rainbows of grey vapor, the trees swinging and leaning curiously at them to search for comprehension, droplets of dew condensing on the leaves and falling back towards the skies like mischievous children when Nátt was not looking over them.

Defiance riddled the night in its smallest features but it was a rather quiet wake for anyone bigger than a gerbil. Hiccup snored unknowingly but a big day lay ahead, it only asked for him to wake up.



## 2. 2 Moony

Hiccup dreamed that night.

A village of faces, vikings and dragons alike, looking at him. A dock without ships and a sea so flat it could have been made of glass, curving on every end as if the world was just a ball, a thin line of ocean to offer blue horizons in any direction and what a trick! For everywhere Hiccup might want to go, he'd keep finding nothing but water until he'd run the world round and all the way back to the tip of the ball, in his fated Berk.

He saw all because fireflies lighted the village with their courting lines drawn in the air, shooting dazzling crowns of shadows from figures around. All of them just a bunch of immobile beings with eyes turning towards Hiccup's every step like a field of Sunflowers having SÃ³l leaving the sky to take a walk among them. He couldn't find Astrid, nor his father andâ€¦ Toothless. He was out there, wasn't he? In the sky, flying awayâ€¦

â€¦to save himself.

Hiccup blinked his eyes one too many times and the fireflies everywhere turned to fire, catching like torches. Despair settled in his heart as they dropped flames of molten gold and it burnt, like nothing else. Everyone turned to ashes in a moment, not even dry autumn leaves would ignite so fast. They justâ€¦ disappeared. His heart sank now with thoughts of his friends, he hadn't seen them but he'd not even looked for them until now. Fishlegsâ€¦ Tuffnut andâ€¦ he stopped and tried to remember if he had actually recognized one single stare before the fire, even one face among the hundreds of them. He knew the village whole, by name and ancestry but they always felt so far away.

The fire was a recurring nightmare from his youth, since he had learnt how his mother had gone, since the moment he'd learnt that their war edged on finding the nest, the vikings had dreamed of that day for centuries because it would mean Victoryâ€¦ but Hiccup knew of how games are supposed to beâ€¦ admitting there can be a victor means you're in for the chance to \_lose\_ too and, in a war with dragons, he could imagine what end was laying in waitâ€¦ if he had been awake he might even find it a more comfortable end than the one haunting his childhood, where the blaze hailed in meteorites from the sky and, usually, a clash of metal fangs followed short.

But it was a Dream. The flames were whisked away suddenly from each firefly, one here, one there, leaving for a single moment a glowing bulb of grey light, a tiny moon in their wake. Everywhere he turned more little gleams disappeared, so he looked up and there it was, the real Moon, pale but free, it was an open window from which to escape, full of hope to give and take.

As the darkness blinked in, he felt that same light from the sky was stretching an invisible hand veiled with the thinnest of silks towards him and, before every firefly died, his hand stretched upâ€¦ the only choice for a drowning man drifting inside a whirlpool to the Abyss.

He tried and tried, outreaching ever more, only to feel but air. And he woke up with his arm forlornly grasping the

breezeâ€|

Beseechingâ€|

Hiccup was wide awake, Toothless still a scaly pillow behind his back. His muscles ached, unwilling to comply to his alertness. He didn't remember the dream and his outstretched hand had been forgotten as soon as the sore spot on his shoulder stung from it, butâ€| for some reason, he felt very conscious of the Moon in the sky. For Hiccup the sight meant something, one of the few things in his life that had a meaning beyond its practical use, it meant '\_Longing\_'. He turned away from it and stood up, aching left and right.

The dark felt threatening but only in a matter-of-fact kind of way, his heartbeat remained calm. Yawning and tensing some muscles, he sauntered under the rustic archway to the rooms.

In the inner one he took a bow from the wall and a string from a pouch full of them. He tried to string it but the tiredness of sleep had still a good hold of him so he took it with him the way it was, a good length of wood being better defense than nothing. The thing would not shoot straight half the times anyway and the whole behavior irked him because a stick and a string should shoot where they're aimed at every time butâ€| No-oh! Only the original composite bow they were all based on seemed to fulfill his expectationsâ€| he was ready to accept the idea that they just disagreed with their maker on a deeper level so using them as a quarterstaff should teach them some!

He went on its left, circling the clearing where Toothless slept and to a turned shield nailed half way up a tree trunk and three arrows still stuck in its center. He took the arrows from this improvised practicing target, they had been rare shots left there to soothe Hiccup's pride and create the illusion of skill. Truth was they'd been three good shots in a row of forty mediocre ones and he'd left them there for so long that birds had pecked away the fletching. He took them out anyway, in his state of mind anything that nettled him ought to be dealt with. Right now he felt stupid for letting fake pride take hold of the shooting range for weeks. He'd been out hunting, alright, but that didn't mean he should stop practicing. Nonetheless a twinge of the same pride brought in the thought:

\_Couldn't Astrid come this way and see just how good I 'Might' be with a bow!\_

He put down the arrows ten feet later and tried again to fit the bow string in both nocks, even using his whole weight on it, but it only broke the bow, one end of it angrily whipping the ground. He threw what remained at a tree and left the disheveled arrows on the ground.

Well, he still had his trusted knife in the left bracerâ€| which he was not wearing. His thoughts had some little gaps like that, it was not just his body that had not fully awoken yet.

Hiccup yawned and kicked autumn leaves on the ground, half the trees on the island shed them, winds and birds had made the whole archipelago a painting of blotched tones in the seasons of change. He

got to the edge where a tree stood, albeit standing was not a truly fitting expression in this case. It was half tipped on the edge so that half its roots were probably drilling the cliff's earth instead of the flat ground.

It had surprised Hiccup since the beginning to find out that many feet of earth would stick to rock on most of these islets but, as he reminded himself, the ruins gave the impression that once upon a time there was a continuous big island here and it had split apart or parts of it had sunk under the sea.

The tree branches had grown trying for any spot of light and opened in a wide flat cone still full of needle leaves. They had a funny name for those trees in the village but he forgot it, evidently the wood wasn't useful to build a bow because he lately remembered those ones. Another curious thing was the direction of the bended trunk: It slung exactly towards the spot in the sky where the Moon was and bended the way a great mooring rope would anchor it to the ground.

"Let's call you Moontree, then." He said, wondering the coincidenceâ€|

**\*\*Clickety-Clack\*\*.**

Hiccup heard â€|\_from below?\_

He went to the edge but below the sea was mostly shadowed by other close-by islets so only some, farther away, glimmered in the moonlight. Other than that only Darknessâ€| the click was fainting away, had the sound accompanied him there? Hiccup decided that rather than peering over the edge of the cliff he'd rather commit to the most probable cause:

Right, it's just the wind pushing branches against the cliff, obviously!\_

He was now closer to the Moontree, its clustered needles gave a barred view of the Moon, many scratches of charcoal above the pale light. Hiccup found it all the more beautiful and amusing, he did like forests but he didn't care that much for the single trees. This one, though, looked beautiful. He put his feet on the trunk preparing himself to, virtually, walk over the edge. There was a different kind of courage in that, the exhausting bravery of curiosity that always brought him into trouble and let him forget all his fears. He walked a step and then deemed safer to fell on all fours grasping the tree. He kept pushing forward nonetheless, his mouth trying to stifle an insane laugh, the kind that accompany words like 'Why am I doing this, anyway?'.

He was doing it in an illogical attempt to get a closer look at the moon, not that flying to the west for days would make a minimal difference in that pursuit but, for all humans know of what's beyond, falling to his deathâ€| thatâ€| just might.

'\_Longing\_â€|'

That bright splendor, hard to believe it, held romance in it even for Vikings. In fact, in Hiccup's childhood it was the only sign that his father's heart might, one day, actually bleed. For Stoick the Vast

the Moon was an annoying reminder to look at with longing eyes and Hiccup had heard the story only once from his own mouth, a tale told to him just so he would never ask it again.

Before he was born his mother, Valka, had always gone on Quests left and right, every occasion to leave the island was a good enough one. Stoick had known her when they were still kids and she had reached the village stowing away on a pirate ship, her adventurous ways had made the love work for the better as there were no two persons more stubborn on the whole island. Despite the love and all she could not be tied down in one place so they allowed the tiniest bit of romance in their life: they decided that even when all the mountains in the world might be standing between them the moon would be their personal mirror, maybe a thousand knots away but they'll find each other there. Hiccup was sure if you were madly in love you could see the loved one's face just about anywhere you looked for it, if you stared at it for long enough, of course.

In the longing and in his irrational desire to reach the light he remembered parts of the dream. It recoiled in his soul, it said things very loudly that he was not about to voice. And what a strange arrangement of them too.

He could not become Chiefâ€¦ lead the village? That was crazy! Why did they expect such thing from him. To take responsibility for the lives of everyoneâ€¦ how did his father manage to face them and keep being chief when he'd led them all to die in the Nest? Why hadn't Hiccup ever asked that question \_to Him\_? Why had it never occur to ask his father all sorts of questions, like how he even lived carrying such a burden for all his lifeâ€¦ and Hiccup, how stupid could he have been: he was on route to the same fate and he never cared to take an interest in these things!

\_I'm doomed. Berk, My father and this nightmareâ€" no! Not the dream, that was justâ€¦\_

â€¦a stupid dream, that's what it was! People don't catch fire like leaves, the Moon doesn't extend a hand to grasp yours and the Earth is not round (although it might have a curvature of sort, he'd admit to \_that\_ after seeing too many times the horizon shift as he flew higher).

When he was too far up the tree to go any further without starting to climb the branches he looked down, at the barkâ€¦ the trunk was bigger than him, his hands couldn't meet on the other side, so he just closed his eyes, slowly inhaled air to calm himself and then peeked over his shoulder.

"No, No. No!" he closed his eyes again. Then one opened and trembled back shut.

It was so different than on top of a dragon. For one thing, he could see pointy rocks below.

\_Why! Why?\_

The view certainly was sobering him up. His muscles now would have certainly strung the bow, for all his hope they might cut the tree in half by how strongly he was clanging to it.

He pushed back and to change scenery turned on the other side, there the light cleared a greater path of the sea where the shadow didn't reach, he could even see where Breath-Cup island reached the sea and thenâ€|

**\*\*Clickety-Clack\*\***â€|

\_Is that aâ€"

**\*\*Clickety-Clack\*\***â€|

â€" \_a Viking ship?\_

His body took advantage of the distraction to speed up the retreat. In his travels to the moon he had gained about nine feet over the edge, like nothing. That's such a long way backâ€|

He stopped before the sight would disappear below the edge. The sails were cut, ruined, it was a relict, it had to have drifted a long way butâ€| it couldn't have been here more than days, the archipelago was full of wrecked ships but "wrecked" was the price of admission. The tides and waves made fast work of them, mincing them to bits and leaving parts hanging from rocks. They won't leave them floating aroundâ€| for long, that is.

He then saw something interesting, more exciting than anything he noticed so far: Booty!

The ship had things in it, loads of it judging by the size of the tarps and how deep was the draught on the back. There was no sparkling inside so the hull was probably dry and not compromisedâ€| all the more reason to be happy. It had been days without rain but the wind had been strong and Hiccup wasn't an expert on sailing currents so the thing could have come from anywhere, finding brief safe harbor in the archipelago until the next stormâ€| which would grind in its keel and bones the sort of fate a boat should really expect in this haven.

But a whole ship full of lootâ€|

\_Now that is luck, isn't it! \_

"Yes!" he whispered through gritted teeth feeling earth under his foot again and rushed to Toothless with as much speed as he felt to give his trembling legs and hands.

"Toothless!" he pushed him on the shoulders.

"Toothless!" he tried to roll him over, fat chance.

"Oh, come on! You're awake! You're no good at playing dead! You've never heard the way you breathe when you really sleep, you know?" it was hardly convincing and this time he sat on his head and tried to open the lids by pulling on the scales where eyebrows should beâ€|

\_Just how damn strong can your eye-muscles be?\_

"Alright! Your laziness might overpower me but you can't outsmart yourself! Aha!"

Not a flinch.

Hiccup found a stone among the leaves, it could have be mistaken for a chicken egg if not for the roughness of its surface. He bounced it in the hand "Readyâ€|" and threw it in a slow arch in front of Toothless snout but ten feet up in the air "Shoot!"

Toothless reacted like he always did, one single eyelid shot open and then an opening the size of a human's mouth appeared between his lips and a small flare beamed out and exploded the stone, showering it to pieces in the direction where the nano-plasma bolt had been aimed at.

"Damn, aren't you amazing!" said Hiccup unamused even though Toothless had become incredibly good at it. They had even taken to play '\_Shoot\_' in Hiccup's room with crumpled pages of the sketchbook, the ones that clustered the size of his deskâ€| of course in that case the plasma bolts were even smaller and it only made for a lot of ash on the floor and some yells from his father if it happened late at night.

"Helloâ€|" Hiccup smiled upside-down from over Toothless' head with a smug smile.

Toothless got up slowly but inexorably like Hiccup's weight didn't matter and the rider fell on his face tumbling over the dragon's head.

It took some while to convince him but then both flew over the forest and down to the sea and slowly found their way back to where the ship was. They landed after a small assessment that there was space and buoyancy sufficient to hold them. The ship was big, in a very \_uncharted\_ sense of the word because \_these\_ kind of ships didn't come to Berkâ€| they didn't come even close to it, nor to their nearby tribes. Hiccup was fairly sure he never saw a boat \_this\_ big and it was so flat it gave a sense of slowness and leisure apt to much calmer seas. How far had this ship traveled?

The emblem on the sails was unknown to Hiccup and it looked like three serpents entangled around a Broadax. As his imagination stared at all the possible silhouettes under the big blankets tied to the back, his eyes fell on the \_wounds\_. From the look of it the ship had been attacked byâ€| byâ€" Everything?!

The sails were full of cuts, \_sliced by talons\_, Hiccup would guessâ€| all the lacerations appeared in groups of three or four and all parallel to one another. The yard had been burnt at one end but the sails and ropes held strong. Actually, so many things on the boat were charredâ€| hard to believe the thing didn't burn completely, the wood must have been quite wet to hold such big patches of fire or maybe someone extinguished it. There were arrows here and there, shot by someone attacking in numbers because the sides were riddled with many still struck above the waterline and there were signs of more hitting belowâ€| they'd probably been washed away or scratched out by the rocks. The building of the ship was sturdy enough that even an axe had been stuck on the low part of the hull without making it leak. A sword, definitely viking too, pierced the ridge at the front where the dragon-shaped prow looked rather foreign to Hiccup: On the long neck the head curved down and then up again with a wide mouth,

giving it the semblance of a serpent more than a dragon.

\_Where does this thing come from? I'd have bet dragons attacked it if it wasn't for all the weaponsâ€¦ maybe dragons were all over it and people from some other ship tried fighting back with arrows? Or maybe it survived the dragons only to meet pirates later on? Or vice-versa?\_

Hiccup realized then how far along the edge it had moved from where he had first spotted it. He took one of the two oars still clinging to the side and, using it as a pole, started pushing against the rocky bottom of the sea to drag it against \_his\_ islet. He might as well try to push the island into their path so he looked at Toothless who had started sniffing every bit of the place.

"Hey, a little help?"

Toothless cocked his head.

"Go up the yard, there! Where the sail is attached? Ah, Right! Sorry!" he went to put the tail fin in the auto-stir gear and Toothless leapt, rocking the whole boat, and got on the mast which tilted under the weight with ominous creaks.

"Push it towards the Moontree! â€"I mean, towards the moon."

Toothless seeing the \_problem \_in Hiccup's plan instead fished for one of the ropes to the sail and bit it with his drawn fangs, then flew feeling the weight below being dragged behind. It was a very annoying task, the rope often pulled back because of rocks holding the ship from below the keel or even on the sides. The ship was getting wounded more and more but Hiccup was trying to use the Oar to keep it away from rocks the best he could. Not that he could do a good job at it, the dragon's Might was dragging a boulder by raw power alone, frail arms with sore pain could barely keep the oar straight in the rushing water, let alone steering the ship. They reached the Moontree with Toothless starting to pull the ship away from the islet so Hiccup yelled at him to use the rope to tie it to the tree above, hoping the weight wouldn't haul it down on his head.

The moving had caused leaks where before there were none. Nothing too serious, the ship was just getting wet but laws of a sinking ship was to hurry out even if it was filling one drop at a time. Hiccup started uncovering sacks full of stuff, he could even spot a box or two and many things were just strapped to the thwarts. He couldn't be sure what everything was so he gave precedence to the ones in sacks because they were easier to carry out. Then he tasked Toothless with the vexing unloading and he started flying up and down with more and more stuff, each departure and touchdown tuning the wood in a more constant creaking. By the end Hiccup was sweating from having to wrap all the loose stuff in the tarps and blankets with any rope he could find, a task that lasted around half an hour with the ship never stopping to rock back and forth and Hiccup collecting more bruises than sacks. His hands had felt mostly cloths but their weight and some solid surface to the touch revealed metal detailing, buttons, pins and all sorts of things Hiccup could find more interesting than money. He didn't know what was in the sacks he'd sent up without opening but those weighted a bit more and one that had been slashed

showed thick leather of a different quality from the ones Berkians were familiar with. What remained then were only four huge boxes stuck between thwarts and he was looking at them in an ever dimming light. The shadows had finally caught up to them and stronger winds whistling from above brought big clouds that covered the moon completely.

"Can you cut the sail from the yard? We'll use it as a big sack." The remaining tarps were too small and the sail was all slashed butâ€| togetherâ€| \_it might just work\_.

"Yeah, Cut them were they latch, see there? The knots, then! Well, don't look at me like that, I didn't design your teeth to be completely useless to cut rope!" Hiccup by instinct avoided a nano-plasma spit shot at his footing and fell on a thwart. Toothless growled a laugh.

"Ouch! Oh, No!" the small precise projectile was never meant to hit Hiccup, just close enough to scare him into falling, but it had hit somethingâ€| a plank of wood that barely held as it was. Having the pillow of water on the other side had avoided it from just splintering away but it was already failing under the water pressure, a constant rivulet already coming inâ€| the ship had regained a foot of waterline by the weight loss but it had been battered more and more against the rocks by Toothless' movements and by the wavesâ€|

\_Damn, it won't hold much longer.\_

"Alright, I'm coming up!" Hiccup said, ready to cut the sails himself, just to notice he wasn't wearing the bracer with the knife on itâ€|

"Wait!" He went to the prow and tried to take the sword out of the wood, he couldn't pull too strongly because it'd just fling him in the waters on the other side the moment the sword was freed. He could barely see as it was and behind him, in the water, there could be only sharp edged rocks for all he knew.

He cursed his un-vikingness and, annoyed, kicked the planks only to open another dripping crack in the side.

"I'm an idiot!" he yelled and then went for the covered boxes and searched in them, the first was almost empty but had a bunch of apples, rotten and putrid and crawling with worms. The second had only scraps of cheese and thick mold was growing out of itâ€|

\_Well, at least the sailors left with their bellies full.\_

The third and fourth boxes made a small wall before the last thwart and the stern of the ship. He heard firstly a faint noiseâ€| but he'd not gotten to the back of the ship yet so maybe it was just settling to his weight. He uncovered the single tarp that was on both boxes pushing it on a pile of other blankets he had not noticed before, they occupied the ending triangle of the ship andâ€|

"Eureka!" said Hiccup, not totally sure what the recently-imported world meant but quite familiar with the context in which to use it.



One box had clothes, very fancy stuff and probably very valuable, but the other had many blades, of knives and small swords that some called saxes, all stripped of their hilt and with the bare tangâ€¦ the best possible treasure to find for any blacksmith in a practical world.

He had not much to enjoy the finding as Toothless had found further use for his flaming tongue than loll it around. The sudden increase in light over the scene had in fact come from Toothless licking with flames the lining of the sails and then scratching at the weakened spots with his tails and round talons. When Hiccup had his yell of joy the sails had just remembered their long due contract with gravity over winds and they fell enveloping the ship and darkening the world once more.

In the muffled hiding Hiccup firstly felt the need to yell "Toothless! What the darn!" but then he felt the more immediate need to survive the knife thrust at him in the confusion under the sail. He had heard the slosh rustling of the blades fall on the hull, one foot too many sloshing in the pond of water and he had dodged instinctively what his hand felt was a small and lean hand. As always at disadvantage over uneven or frictionless ground Hiccup reeled against the rim of the ledge of the ship and found the hem of the sails with his fingers. He pulled it off but as his head found again the night a weight slung the whole boat like a see-saw and he was rocked unto the prow. Toothless had landed as soon as he had perceived his friend being in danger but the idea had only shot the whole ship on its side and flung it against the rocks, under the shadow of the big island in its shape of a cup. Now Hiccup could see nothing at all, only having the clarity of thought to yell some well-thought warnings:

"Toothless! Don't light any fires and don't shoot! Don't even move! If the ship rocks or sinks any more there's a whole floor of sharp stones that could cut steel under us! We might cut ourself just by trying to take flight and you never know what's gonna get cutâ€¦ might even be my throat!" even the armor that would have protected his torso and neck was still in the forgeâ€¦

\_Damn! And I've given away my position thoroughly by giving a lecture!\_

In the darkness he stood still, would any movement of feet even be heard with the boat creaking all over? But there was water underâ€¦ if feet walked on itâ€¦ easy to avoid by walking on the thwarts or on the fallen sails. Had the assailant freed himself from that blanket?

Hiccup decided that he might as well be ready to risk doing something stupid. Yes, he might ask Toothless to light his mouth and show a bit around but that would just give anyone else the initiative to attack Hiccup who, by the way, was not armed while the other one was. Soâ€¦

\_It's a risk I'm quite comfortable withâ€¦ if it's worth my life anywayâ€¦\_

He took out the sword and drew it, there was no reaction from the shadows to the sound of drawing metal.

\_Alright, fairer odds than I would have had this morning, at leastâ€| unless I managed to ruin it by fixing it. Nope, can't think like that! Not now!\_

Hiccup gave it the click and then waited a shorter moment than he would have done otherwise and let the small trigger come back lighting the flame. The Sword was working \_Per-Fect-Ly\_, the flames came out just about enough not to burn Hiccup and as they sizzled from bottom to top the Dragon saliva gurgled up the small paths, pushed by the pressured gas in the lower chamber. It worked and the holder could not even take a moment to enjoy himself because he could now get a very good view of his enemy and it wasâ€| \_definitely \_not what he was expecting.

It was a girl, two long braids in a disheveled dress and, by the looks, she was probably between eight or ten years old. And she was so scared that Hiccup felt incredibly guilty of putting her through such fear. She was terrorized, her eyes so wide the white in them made perfect glinting rings in the sword's light, her teeth chattering to the point of grinding themselves against each other, even the orange flame could not paint over the paleness of her skinâ€|

Hiccup tried to distance the sword from her and even trying to telepathically make Toothless back away. The first time he had brandished his weapon, live and healthy and ready to battle assassinsâ€|

â€|\_and this is the fight I get? The Gods and their humorâ€|

—

â€|albeit Hiccup didn't believe Gods had anything to do with humans and their stupid misfortunes. \_That\_ didn't stop him from blaming them from time to time, the kind of thing you feel entailed to when you follow the observances of the Religion anyway.

He lowered the sword only to learn that fire has a preferred direction and it might just coincide with your arm if it stands higher than the hilt, the sword sprung back up scaring the girl who held up her knife in response.

"Wait, calm down! Please!"

\_What a great situation! If I lower the weaponâ€| in a place like this she might actually get a good swing of the knife before I fall down on my assâ€| a peg leg on a rocking boat full of water! Now, that's no fun at all! I'll get my own Saga for how stupidly I died at the hands of a kid.\_

The situation was rather delicate and 'handling it' meant to have a plan, a good one preferably. The girl was looking at the Sword and at the Dragon, in turn, giving Hiccup the smallest awareness. Hiccup slowly moved his right hand under the sail and whispered Toothless to light his mouth.

The Dragon's mouth lighted a bright blue tone which looked very dim once Hiccup turned off the sword. He lowered it on the boat where the wood smolderedâ€| better the hull than the sails, the blade was probably still hot enough to light the dry parts of such fabric. Then he smiled confident of the fact that his harmless face had secured

him a bullied childhood. Even the girl would have to admit that Hiccup missed out on having the ruthless attitude forged on their cheeks, jaws and eyes, like any other Viking had. Sadly, in a tenuous blue side-light everyone looks scary and she launched herself over the sails ready for a frontal assault, trying to take advantage of the moment when the man with the flaming sword was unarmed.

Hiccup reacted a bit more promptly than he hoped he had to— the sails moved under her feet and Hiccup wrapped one end like a whip and started rolling it around the girl, at the best of his footing. A tearing sound of knife on cloth still came from inside and Hiccup took a piece of rope and tied at one end then pointed at the other.

"Grab that and let's get out!"

They flew away as the ship recoiled by imploding a couple of planks under the strain of the fast and heavy departure. They leapt through the air and let the furled sail on the grass near the Moontree.

Hiccup tired of the effort felt his tone slide into threatening and evil:

"You feel the ground under you? You're on the edge of the Cliff! Move too much and you'll fall two-hundred feet into pointy rocks!"

The movement inside stopped but a more patient tearing of fabric could still be heard. In truth she was quite far from the edge and the islet rose maybe forty feet above the sea on that point but Hiccup felt venomous. The girl had arisen all the piety he might ever find in himself but he wasn't forgetting that not two minutes had passed from her last attempt on his life and from the sound of it she wasn't giving up a next attempt.

Hiccup led Toothless back to the edge and down to the ship, trying to retrieve the small treasure but there were no more blankets on the ship, \_the girl\_ must have been the pile of tarps he'd seen in the ship's back— if she was using one to cover herself she must have flung it off boat or maybe they'd thrown it off boat with their ascending maneuver. Hiccup quickly fished maybe ten blades out of the freezing chaos underfoot, full aware of the fact that the box might have contained even fifty of them, and put them all in the clothes from the other box which were much thinner than he thought they would be and only half a dozen overall, probably left there with all the air and space they could occupy to avoid folds on such fine work— and Hiccup was using them to hold dirty sharpened blades—

Toothless gave Hiccup gummy bites as his paws were already deep in water, Hiccup sighed and agreed. He move to him and fell between thwarts, completely underwater in the chilling night. Any possible residual desire to sleep was instantly killed. He shoot up and climbed in the saddle giving a pat to Toothless's head as a silent sign to make a cautious departure, not trusting his tongue to speak between chattering teeth. They flapped away more slowly but the slow start was even worse as the ship fell three times below the waterline, one for each flap, embarking buckets of water every time, and when Toothless' paws had left any ground the ship was already burbling down, probably on a short journey to a shallow bottom.

\_Maybe I can come back another day and fish them outâ€¦ or even better, if Astrid tells on me I'll just invite the others and Fishlegs and Snotlout will gladly do it for me if Ruffnut is here too.\_

They landed once again near the sail which, to Hiccup's surprise, had covered half the distance to the edge. He stamped on the less tangled end stopping it from moving any further and took out one of the knives out of the ones in the clothes, letting the whole pile fall on the side. He was going to slice open that textile prison when he noticed that another point of blade was showing through a good slice vertical to the roll.

"Wellâ€¦ since you're so good at it!"

He put the knife in his belt and pushed the rolled mass back towards the center of the island and strode towards the Moontree.

\_The rope is thereâ€¦ and the treeâ€¦ It's still holding! Wow!\_

He stepped slowly and cautiously over the trunk, Toothless this time spectator to the bravery of his rider. Hiccup crawled down immediately as he realized how slippery it was with only one foot in a sloshing boot and the otherâ€¦ well. After all he did crawl last time too and he was dry back then. His left hand took out the knife again, stretched and started sawing the rope that Toothless had wrapped around the tree in five loops. Then took courage and looked down while the knife kept hacking at it and he saw that only the mast was out of the water and the tied knots of the rope were sliding up to the yard. They had probably done short work of the nails he'd seen in the mast, the full weight of a boat filled with water and the strength of the Moontree had strung the whole thing to such tension that Hiccup should have guessed the nails or the rope would break long before the tree did. As the rope snapped down and the mast sank Hiccup clang with closed eyes in the slow swing the elasticity of the tree allowed. Then he went back on the cliff ignoring the length of rope still wrapped around the treeâ€¦ he might cut it out at some point to keep the island stealthy and all butâ€¦ not today.

\_Maybe the next storm will see to itâ€¦!\_

He sloshed back, still dripping water from everywhere but now a bit happier. As he reached the sail he saw the girl's head trying to crawl out of it.

Sleep and cold water seemed to have cured his sore spots because he crouched down keeping the smile he had.

"Hi little girl."

She hissed at him with forewarning but her eyes still betrayed some fear. Hiccup took the length of the sails without ropes, where apparently were the girl's feet and dragged it for very few feet before Toothless took over for his hand and followed the squelching steps to the clearing pulling the thing. Every now and then the steps and the clanging of stolen metal stopped and a small cursing started but they reached the immediate ground in front of the hideout.

Toothless stopped there while Hiccup went to one side of the ruins, there he had a lot of chopped wood stashed and fairly dry, protected by the fallen roof of the former second floor which had allowed a cover of moss to grow on its exposed side. He had made the pile when he first started fixing the place on the island, only to never use it. He didn't live in the place, after all, and he could make due with the warmth of the forging hearth or the outside furnace. He threw some logs of wood on a bare surface of stone, that had been a favorite spot for Toothless's naps so nothing grew there for long.

Toothless without being asked blew a continuous slow burning flame on the logs that caught slowly, starting the small popping sound of wet wood. The girl had stopped flinching as this scene took place but Hiccup had decided to ignore her completely to let her nervousness and fear settle down. Seeing him not arming her might work better than telling her he wasn't gonna. And since doing \_that\_ might just set her off it felt like the right approach. After all she had ignored him up until he had reached the end of the ship and she must have been there during the whole looting enterprise, right?

\_She didn't appear out of thin air, that's for sure.\_

As she looked at Toothless, taken by the sight of the dragon all curled up like a kitten, he took a glance of her face. She looked a bit emaciated or was it the paleness that gave that effect? Had she survived off that rotten food on the ship?

He was worried of the story that had brought her to live alone in a vessel adrift, did anyone die on the ship? Must haveâ€¦ who would leave a girl so young to the care of winds and waves? Were her parents on board when \_whatever\_ happened? She had not left even when she was in sight of an island. She was too young to realize, perhaps, but her ride would have sunk and she would have died in the freezing water. Maybe she had kept herself under the blankets the whole timeâ€¦ What had she drunk in all those days.

\_Maybe nothingâ€¦\_

Realization dawned on him and he moved a bit faster than before towards the archway and inside, soon his hands roaming hastily through his provisions. He had a barrel of rainwater that collected inside directly from the yew tree above. Most of the water above the roof went in his handmade drainpipes and the water in those was \_Filthy\_, this instead came down quite naturally and was as clear as molten ice. He brought a whole tankard of it and left it in front of her, out of reach of her knife's blade. He noticed she had freed herself a bit more when he'd gone inside. She looked at it apprehensively, giving a uncertain look at Hiccup, both angry and miserable. He left her more space and she crawled at it, drinking the water avidly.

"You'll feel sick if you drink it all in one go."

She kept looking at him over the big mug without any attitude but manifestly ignoring his words.

\_Maybe she speaks a different dialect or a whole other language?\_

"Do you want something to eat?"

A drop of water fell from the mug and she flinched. She lowered the mug but only to stare at him, slowly acquiring a frown of defiance.

\_She does understandâ€|\_

"Right. What luck that I have some food here with meâ€|" he unstrapped a sack from his shoulder and took out several forms wrapped in cloth, putting them where he had left the full tankard before. He started by proffering a waterskin he untied from his belt.

"Here I have some fresh sheep's milk from this morning, yesterday's bread, smoked salmon, some salted cod, sheep's cheeseâ€" ah, sorry, I saw on the boatâ€| I'll put this back, then. This one is lamb's meat treated to last a long time so, you might find it a bit sour. Thisâ€| you shouldn't eat. I caught this and I'm not sure I smoked it right, maybe rabbits' meat is not meant to be smoked at all. Not that it's easy to know, I can tell you, there's only one island that has them so it's not like there are any recipes for them in my villageâ€|"

He was trying to make her accustomed to his voice but she was just eying everything, she didn't seem to care much about names and descriptions. Maybe that was for the best because it meant she was letting her guard down, there had to be some sort of trust involved in such a shuffle of priorities.

\_Or, Maybe, she is just starving to deathâ€|\_

The sight of her, eating, was like watching Dragons at a troughâ€|

\_How long since she's last eaten something? â€"something  
\_\_\*\*edible\*\*\_\_ anywayâ€|\_

He sighed and got closer. He handed her the sheep's meat which she was eying the most after she'd finished both cod and salmon.

"I think you should come to my village, there you'll have clothes and fooâ€" Ouch! Are you mad?" She'd bit into his hand, pulled away by the other hand pushing on her nose. The teeth had drawn blood.

He faced her with a stare as angry as she held it defiant.

"Alright. I Will Drag You to the village, willingly or not. I can't deal with a annoying-grouchy-darnâ€"little-brat like you! And you Bit me!"

The villageâ€| the dreamâ€|

\_Oh! Who cares! I don't have time to start thinking about that!\_

He stood up and with a short step and a well calculated kick with his peg leg he sent her knife too far for her to retrieve it. She started yelping out of despair again, like a lost dog eyeing a lost hope. Hiccup's compassion had short-fused over the bite, he knew the bite would disappear in a couple of days with his callous hands hardened by smithery but stillâ€| her teeth had sunk stronger over the nail of

his little finger and it hurt like someone had left an iron spike through it. He strode back again to the room and came out later having changed his clothes back to another leather suit fit for flying and, lucky for him, he caught her biting her way out of the last of the sail as she freed her foot.

He ran between her and the knife and this time took out his knife on the left bracer without trying to look negotiable. He threw her a bundle of clothes and told her to change or put them on the clothes she was already wearing. She just stuck her tongue outâ€|

"Plan B, then."

He took a rope and, using a rediscovered agility on steady dry ground he tied her hands and her feet, dodging her teething mouth. His agility had actually surprised her enough that she she had her hands tied before she could even make a sensible movement to help her situation. The yelling started and grew in the glade. Hiccup tired of the whole night, dragged her by the ropes and threw her gently in Toothless' lap, as the soft weight's thump left the dragon completely unfazed and with closed eyes. Being there was enough to froze her with fear nonetheless.

"I've got a Dragon and I might just set it on you."

Toothless' snort of derision at the statement had the unintended effect to terrorize her some more.

Hiccup went inside and the preparations for the return came with several thuds, some rustling and more cussing. Outside, Toothless had started to open his eyes, he was very familiar with the fracas of tidying up and the boarding of the windows. He knew it all meant they'd be up in the air soon so he started stretching as the weight on his side leaned trembling. In his most doe-eyed way he took notice of her, curious. Toothless looked like a big kitten but vikings were not all too familiar with cats, aside the wild lynx that steal the poultry on bigger islands. She fell to the ground and he sniffed her inquiringly without attempting to touch her. He just made a ring around her with his tail and body as he lay down, chin on the ground.

Minutes later Hiccup was back with another big bundle of rags and ropes. He hopped over the tail, stood in front of her and smiled.

"You didn't want clothes, soâ€|"

The Wind, below.

The morning felt definitely boring compared to what had preceded it and Hiccup indulged himself to some yawning. He had time to think of his dream and he found it less and less interesting or meaningful. Monotony was setting in once again and with it any existential doubt washed away into more practical thoughts, like Breakfast.

Sunrise came on his back and Hiccup still didn't realize he'd spent his first night away from home, not fearing if he'd given his father the scare of a lifetime, not wondering if he'd even notice his absence. He had things occupying his mind right now, like the girl he had strapped to the saddle under his arms. She was bound in a torso

leather armor of Hiccup which easily contained her arms too, blocking them from moving. She was still tied hands and feet but he had rolled three blankets around her, a scarf on her neck and two security ropes that would make harder for her to fall than for him. He had done it in ten minutes so it completely lacked style but it didn't matter, even one second less of her shrieking was worth any funny comment the scene would inspire from the Hairy Hooligans Tribe.

To lull and annoy her at the same time he had started talking normally and prolixly, telling stupid tales of the mischievous stuff he did when he was her age and of how, at the time, he only counted Fishlegs as his friend and it was all so much simpler because no one wanted him around "â€|a bit like you, Miss. I bet people will pay to send you back home as soon as we find out where it isâ€|"

And talked and talkedâ€| the dream forgotten. Checking every now and then on his compass on the right bracer as for habit since Toothless knew better than him the way home. To her, he explained that too "â€| because, you see, we have memories of lands but dragons have memories of sea too. They can find a spot in the sea like we can find a house in our villageâ€|"

And then they started flying by a pod of Thunderdrums breaching through the Ocean in their swim. The trio was flying very close to the sea and it seemed to calm the girl, in the beginningâ€| until she realized there were big mouths leaping from the sea and they weren't whales. But the shrieks didn't change their course, they kept following. Toothless knew his rider more than anyone else especially about things Hiccup never explained in words.

Hiccup loved flying in all its forms and aside from the more reckless kind, gliding beside a packs of Thunderdrums was second only to following a flocks of Timberjacks. There were no freer dragons than them out there, one for the utmost heights and the other for the depthless seas, so when the pair were just flying leisurely they liked to stand in the wake of one of those packs and just be a part of it.

"You'll never see them following a Queen's orders, you can bet on that! Eh, bud?"

Hiccup had been obliviously rude to Toothless and the latter reminded him by twirling in the air and under a wing of a Thunderdrum that had just tried his higher jump yet. Hiccup's legs clenched on the saddle, one hand sought some holding while the other grasped the roll of blankets in front of him. The scare had stirred Hiccup but had set off the girl like a wailing teapot.

"You were young, that's all! I think you followed the Queen's whims just becauseâ€| well, I've never seen another Night Fury, have you? I tried to be a Viking like the old kind too because I had no one else but them to follow as example! They say my mom was all sort of crazy, totally like me but she wasn't there. If I had her I'd probably be sailing the seas and if you had grown up with your family all your choices would be totally different." Then thoughtfully added "I'm we can find other Night Furies if we fly around the world for long enoughâ€| maybe even your original pack!"

But as always Hiccup was left to think his own troubles away by asphyxiating them with abstruse reasoning. If Toothless could talk



back Hiccup would save himself a lot of headaches.

To the girl still yelping he said "If you keep at it you'll blow your vocal chords and you'll never be able to speak again. Ever." A random thought which magically shut her up for the rest of the day and would push her whole life into a much less scream-worthy direction, although neither of the people present at that moment took any notice of the magnitude of the event. The girl was too scared of about everything and Hiccup's mind was miles away.

"You know, finding a girl on a ship with viking emblems never seen before— someone like dad— he'd see that as a sign— and he believes in that sort of stuff, he'd get with the Goths and sentence me to travel and find her homeland saying something like \_maybe you're meant to travel to the far lands she comes from— Ha! ha! Right?"

They left the Thunderdrums for higher altitudes and an island sneaked a peak over the horizon— Berk.

Hiccup checked his compass to see how much they had strayed following the Thunderdrums.

\_We're further North than usual.\_

"As I was saying, it might just be a big Sign telling us we ought to fly away on our Journey as soon as we can. Tomorrow even!"

He noticed Toothless shadow as he descended in a steep glide, closer and closer to the waters, it was a long pointed needle. He looked around, water all around them and a needly shadow pointing to Berk. He closed the compass and swallowed a knot.

"Now— Lucky for me I've never believed in signs and suchlike—"

### 3. 3 Burdens

The Sunrise behind and, closing in, Berk!

Sea, waves and sky were parting like curtains. A flock of many colors was just ahead, Terrible Terrors leaving the fattest sea stack to meet the newcomers with their own packed cloud of wings. Hiccup saw their welcoming flight and recognized a dance, the one that meant rain was near, probably in the afternoon. He smiled to the idea of creeping in the house and barricading himself in his cozy room for all day long— the burning freeze was still in his bones and the weariness of the last hours pounded his mind shut.

The girl already snoring wrapped in front of him made his eyelids feel even heavier by the minute. Among the rushed stares from the Terrible Terrors he saw eyes quite different from the usual slit kind. These had big pupils of emerald and amber scrutinizing Hiccup for instants that stopped time.

\_Not strange at all.\_ He yawned to himself, he wouldn't be surprised of bears growing wings and drawing rainbows in honor of bees right about now.

Hiccup led Toothless down towards the sea's surface as they approached, a bit of recklessness in him was awoken by the sight of his village and they joined the wispy little dragons' cloud in a zig-zag among the steep columns in front of Berk.

"Hiccup! Hey!" came a yell from one of two fishermen boats, they were moving through the same maze but at the slow pace of pachyderms threading through water. They had probably spotted the show in mid-stroke on their oars and found it a good excuse to catch a breath.

Hiccup just waved his hand without turning his head, the captive girl tied to the saddle was asleep and he didn't want to wake her up. They approached the dock and saw the ships, seagulls perched on the masts and yards, there were more sails than he'd expectedâ€|

â€|\_Guests!\_

Toothless' wings whiplashed the wet air to almost stall themselves in place which set off a firework of seagulls toward the sky. The girl just burred a groan. Hiccup smiled at the white feathery chaos he had set in motion: dragons and birds blatantly ignore each other most times. It's like pride cuts both ways and each kind finds the other species is beneath themâ€| nonetheless size, flames and fangs can force a quick intuitive hierarchy in hollow bones. Hiccup got a full view of the two new ships, recognized the emblems on the sails and set forward to Home.

\_Meatheads\_â€|

They were the closest tribe to Berk, their island further South-East, and they held Berk in a rivalry status. '\_Meatheads are stupid on the face of it and that's what they do best!\_' Stoick the Vast used to say. He meant it as a compliment. They looked stupid and acted even more so but that was their way of doing things, to let you forget how clever they were. Hiccup had not believed this logic until his saddle broke '\_again\_' \_mid-flight\_, risking his neck and stranding him not far from their island. They'd been forced to stop to the Meatheads' village and to their blacksmith, Knocker, to fix it. The man had not said a word before or after hammering the pieces out from its forge but in its final product he had added a simple modification, a hook that would prompt if the belt was not opened by two hands which made it a perfect safety measure for any accidental failure of the buckles. The solution was simple and beyond clever and Hiccup had used it ever since probably owing his life to the device. That didn't make him avoid the Meatheads any less, the whole thing gave Hiccup the scary thought of peoples with two minds in one headâ€|

Still flying above the village Hiccup spotted a piece of art: on the ground, taking a semicircle of the square, was a crude drawing, what was meant to look like a crazy person on a Night Fury. One could infer such description by the wash of charcoal spent on making the dragon's hide and the fact that the rider was cross-eyed, mouth gaping in a yell and arms like a waving S of panic. "Hiccup" was scratched on the dragon's side but wandering boots had probably smudged the last bit.

\_Right,\_ Hiccup remembered that the famed Subtlety of the Meathead clan was skipping the current generationâ€| he knew all too well who

had done it or more likely \_ordered\_ that thing done, he could certainly spot some hint of Thuggory's kind of cleverness in the fact that they assumed he would come back home flying. Grounded people would just walk on the drawing and see ashes on the sole of their bootsâ€|

\_Oh, whatever! An idiot's an idiot'z an idiotzanidiottâ€"\_

Hiccup circled the square a couple more times, there were only two or three people walking down the streets, definitely fishermen, the others early risers and night owls hanged around their homes. The Meatheads had probably come the day before and stayed the night otherwise the scenery would be differentâ€|

â€|\_andâ€| I've not slept in Berk tonightâ€| for the teeth of Odin!\_

Hiccup's realization came with a sudden weight and his foot clicked instinctively to fit that sensation to the flat reality. The gear stirred and the tail fin brought them down in front of their home a bit more abruptly than initially intended. Hiccup let loose his vest's links to the saddle and then unstrapped the girl. She was drooling herself awake in more mumbling groans that almost resembling sentencesâ€| \_that whimper\_ probably meant she wasn't mute to language as she'd given the impression so far.

Stoick the Vast came out clonking throughout the doorway. Huge thuds that shook Hiccup's attention, the steps quite expertly imitated the weight of a Behemoth and displayed a temper ready to wage war. The avalanche lost its attitude as he came closer and saw his son trying to dodge the bites of a braided head coming out of a rolled rug. Most words usually fail in front of sheer bemusement and the words he had planned on saying to his son came out lisped and strangled until they reverted to genuine stupor, much more fitting to any Viking.

"As I live and breath! What have you gotten yourself into?"

Hiccup just crooked his brows and turned his head with an awkward smile before pushing the roll with the rabid head onto him.

"Whatâ€"

"Take her in the house, Dad. It keeps biting me!"

"Who's \_Her\_?" Stoick said lifting the rug straight in front of him like it was a small baby, his muscles didn't tremble a millimeter. Her mouth showed her teeth and growled before trying to bite the shaggy face in front of her. Stoick nonchalantly moved her a bit away from his nose letting the teeth click empty and then put the whole rug under his armpit and looked around. The show had drawn the attention of many a glance from people, even three Terrible Terrors that had followed Hiccup in his flights were circling them.

Circumspectly Stoick pushed Hiccup with the sole of his boot in the house and strolled inside himself.

"A girl! You go and kidnap a girl! What is the Village gonna say? What would your mother say?"

"Hem? Congrats?" said Hiccup awkwardly, not expecting \_That\_ reaction.

"What are you? Some old troglodyte vikings from centuries long ago? Hiccup!"

"Dadâ€"

"No, you listen to me, you can't go and take a princess just because you're a chief's son or because you like her andâ€| look at herâ€" the girl, conversation savvy, let in a pause between snapping teeth â€"she's just too young! We don't do things like that anymoreâ€| what of the politics!" his eyes widened "Is she the Uglithug Chief's daughter?â€" he turned to study her and mumbled â€"I hear they kidnap her for sport butâ€| Oh! Have you gone mad?" he snapped back.

"Dad, she isn'tâ€"

"Even if it's not \_Her\_, \_Whoever\_ she is it'll drag us all in trouble for the politics and appearances of it. Even if that were right, you can't just go and steal \_any\_ girl, the wife of yours will make an ally of her tribe so you can't just go and steal \_anyone\_, you gotta steal the right oneâ€| What tribe is she from anyway?"

"Wait a second! Did you just say I'm \_allowed\_ to steal girls now?"

Stoick was at an impasse but as a good chief he didn't flinch a moment "You're \_allowed\_ to steal the right girl, upon \_\*\*Penance\*\*\_ of marriage!"

Hiccup shook his head of this nonsense "Hey, let's be clear! I'm not gonna marry her!"

"Even worse son! Do you even know what you did when you put a seat on that dragon? You made this village turn against its strongest Viking tradition, we're the tribe that doesn't fight dragons and you're supposed to be the flag of the \_Modern Thinking\_.â€" it felt to Hiccup like his father wanted to spit those words â€"You can't go all wild viking on us and then you pull a '\_Princess Rescue Escapade\_', which everyone knows is just plain old kidnapping, Son! In the oldest and stupidest of Viking's stereotypes to boot!"

"What? Howâ€| Whyâ€| Just let me talk! I have \*\*not\*\* kidnapped her!" he said pointing a finger right to her nose, the girl having being addressed as a princess too many times had started blushing and lost the opportunity to bite the baiting index that Hiccup, in the exasperation, had so stupidly made available.

"What do you mean?" said Stoick nonplussed, like kidnapping the girl had been the only viable explanation.

"Is that it? I rescue a girl and you think I kidnapped her for \_marriage\_?" a growl hissed and Hiccup slid his finger back at his side.

"Why did you tie her up for, then?"

"She kept biting and kicking!"

"Something \_any\_ sensible kidnapped Princess would do." Stoick said condescendingly "It happens in every story of the kind. In fact I believe it's viking \_Custom\_ to let go free any Princess who doesn't fight capture" Well "Doesn't really matter" As I said very old and stupid ideas about Vikings, I bet most stories are made by that stupid eagled Empire in the south to depict us as Brutes and such"

\_Brutes!\_ Hiccup wanted to laugh, he remembered the shack they once had to keep dry wood logs for the fire. The thing fell on itself when the pillars were hacked beyond saving from tally marks of all the dragons Stoick had slain in raids, some of the marks were possibly pirates that challenged fate one time too many.

"Us? Brutes? Kind of offensive" Hiccup said sarcastically but the tone fell on deaf ears "Vikings are immune to most forms of irony.

Stoick was looking at a girl as if she was a pig to buy or a big cod on a fishing line, the sort of look he reserved for enemies or situations he did not fully understand, **\*\*Yet\*\***.

"Who's she then?"

"I don't \_actually\_ know who she is" She won't speak a word and her ship "I've never seen their emblem or a ship so short in height and large in width. Didn't look like anything that could float for long. Also, it had been attacked by pirates probably lots of arrows on the sides." He didn't plan to speak of his other suspicions, he had seen arrows and swords, the burns wood and the slashed sails could have been anything. Of course they weren't just \_anything\_ and he wasn't fooling himself past a point of being a blind idiot but saying dragons killed people would make troubles, \_especially\_ as a rumors and \_especially\_ for him. \_Once\_ and \_If\_ the girl talked, some answers would come up, hopefully.

"Where was this?"

"Hem" beyond Clofflif." Not a lie, technically.

"Can you lead a ship to the boat?"

"It was sinking to the mast when we took off with Toothless, Dad." Again, truth. The fact that they inadvertently sank it that he knew perfectly where it sank that you could probably still walk on the deck just below water in a calm day Details! The whole thing would lead everyone to his island one way or another and what good would that do to him? He had saved the sail, if it came to it he could bring that back and certainly someone would recognize the emblem on it

"Alright then, are you sure it was a viking ship anyway? You said it was weird, maybe"

"No dad, Dandruff the Adventurous showed me sketches of what \_foreign\_ ships look like and this was viking, the prow's head, the sails, the oars and their ports, the hall and thwarts" it was the way we do it, just different, that's all. I think it's the sort of

shape you use along a coast. It must have gotten this far by drifting after the attack."

"You mean it reached Clofflif from one of the endless coasts? That's balderdash!"

"We haven't seen storms for a week and winds are strongâ€¦ It could haveâ€¦" but even Hiccup in his maritime ignorance found that hard to believe, someone had to have at least sailed the ship into open sea and towards the strong currents up-north for that scenario to work. Those currents were devil themselves to get on to.

Stoick the Vast turned to her in all his vastness and she shrunk in her clothed prison leaving only her eyes peering out. He tore the whole thing in his grasp, even Hiccup's armor holding her arms stiff ripped along the straps.

"Hey!" Hiccup took offense more at the armor's damage than at freeing his newfound archenemy. Then he stepped back saying "Yeah, I was getting around to do thatâ€¦ hey, Wait!"

She, now untied, ran back towards the door where two Terrible Terrors had come in following Hiccupâ€¦ she veered towards the stairs but her kidnapper was there, she opted for the only corner that seemed safe enough, where a bed stood under the stairs. She climbed in and wrapped her arms on her knees in the dark corner.

"Ohâ€¦"

"The poor thing is scared out of her mind, Hiccup!"

"I knowâ€¦ she had to live on that wreck eating rotten stuff and I'm not sure she had anything to drink eitherâ€¦ Hemâ€¦" he caught his father's furrowed brows "â€¦" but I've given her something to eat! Meat, fishâ€¦ water, of course, lots of water! Not too much, thoughâ€¦" he started defensively but his father's accusing stares unnerved Hiccup into silence.

Toothless came in carrying a strong smell of fish from the mangers, he stood alert across the door, both Terrible Terrors retreated around Hiccup's legs. He looked at the girl and compassionately got closer to her as she started sobbing, certainly not realizing how he was the obvious cause of her ever-increasing discomfort. The dragon snorted and jumped on one of his favorite wooden beams high up, where he could perch and keep tabs on the girl.

Stoick left that sight and came back to his son.

"Why weren't you at the Dragon Races?"

"What?"

"You committed yourself to be at the races, Hiccup."

"What?" the world had been taking too many leaps sideways in the last day or so. If his father, uncomplicated and rude to the bone, made such leaps in a conversation it could only mean he had an Agenda all along.

\_Oh dearâ€¦\_

"I asked you to be there and you said yes."

"I did? Iâ€| might haveâ€| if you asked while I was busy, I don't rememberâ€| it's not the sort of thing Iâ€| they're just races, Dad. What do you even care if I'm not there?"

"They're part of traditions we are forging anew on this unknown path, Hiccup.â€" to which Hiccup grimaced, his father sounded strange, official â€"We thread careful now, Son! The other tribes are looking at Us, Hiccup, and **\*\*not\*\*** with respect. A tribe forges its reputation through its customs, beliefs and the prominent names of its people. You are one of those names, Hiccup."

"Why do you even care about the other tribes that much?" Hiccup flung his hands around, this conversation was turning into another lecture on leadership.

"I care because we help each other when we are in troubles, because we're one army when the Romans walk their legions up north, because we might be an island but the seas divide us from the world only in winter and storm. Because we are many leaves of the same branch and every branch together makes one tree, same seed, same roots, Hiccup!"

"Really?" Hiccup smirked in disbelief. "One tree right? What help have they ever given us against Dragons before the situation changed!"

His father's stare bounced sideways a couple of times before finding balance. "They brought us food and iron when we needed it."

"At a price, Dad! We paid for it!"

"They sold it to us at a fairer price than we would have gotten it otherwise."

"While We spilled blood!"

"We?" His father was starting to show teeth below the shaggy braided mustache.

"Our family, Dad. Your Wife, My Mother! And Frilltree, and Snugglepot, and Tattlefeet! All dead! How many do I have to name for you? This was Your line of reasoning when you and the village caught Toothless and were ready to kick me out as an Outcast. Right?"

"It'sâ€| different, Son."

"Don't 'Son' me! I don't need a lecture! They've pitied our village for generations because we live this far North and we had to fight dragons since the village was just fallen fir trees around a fire. That's all there is to it. They only cared to bring us anything because we sold them Dragon skins and fangs. A rare but cheap price for the dead, if you ask me."

"You never cared about politics! Run and jump in the sky every time I try to reason with you and Now you've got so much to say?"

"Well, if I can't resent the dragons anymore I might as well resent Someone, the Tribes seem about the right mark if they want to preach us on our Policy in favor of dragons. They could have sent warriors when we buried our heads every year by the dozen instead of sending words of disapproval when we put our asses on saddles and fly around."

"Don't snap at me, Son." furrowed eyebrows barely showed piercing angry eyes. "The Meathead clan was invited to the races, you offended them by not being there."

"Did you have to invent excuses for me?"

"Do you believe I would? No excuses were given for your rudeness."

"See? We're too far North and West to be political about this stuff and yet you want me to be all diplomatic and such. It's down in the Shetland and Britain that people 'care', we can throw swords at each other at midday and laugh for it in the Mead Hall at midnight. If I'm not at the races they won't give a hoot."

"I give a hoot, a boot and an axe!" gritted teeth walked closer menacingly, Hiccup's eyes fled where his feet couldn't and he noticed the girl was peering on them above her hugged knees, she didn't even seem preoccupied about a Terrible Terror rolled sleepily at the foot of the bed, or maybe she just couldn't see it.

Hiccup dodged his father by walking sideways and gave him a glance that surprised himself more than Stoick, maybe sleeping away from Berk and saving a girl had given him more courage than he usually brought with him in this kind of discussion.

"I'm going to my bedroom!"

He trod and clinked his way up as his father spit out the window with enough fierceness to scar the cobblestones.

"Hiccup! the Elders of the Meatheads are in the Village!" rumbled his father and his mouth twitched behind the red beard, the eyes flared a couple of times, the eyebrows danced like scimitars in a circus. Hiccup nodded because he heard all the unspoken words. Among the most loud there was "as future Chief of the Tribe" and "Elders means you go out and be Political about it". All of that translated to the annoying task of dragging the unbending boneheads around showing how amazing dragons are and probably having to get drunk with them and tell the 'Tale of the Battle at the Nest', something he never had to worry about because there was always someone ready to butt in and recount in his place at the first sign of a stammer (which always happened in the first couple of sentences, more due to deftness in acting than real nervousness).

Hiccup was half up the stairs when he stopped, peered below the ceiling that floored his room and remembered what he was leaving behind, the girl! She was now starting to shake like a leaf because it seemed like she was being left alone with the most scaly company. He ran down and yelled "Dad! The girl!".

His father stopped halfway, it was such a force of habit to end their discussion by storming out of the room that the girl had slipped off



Stoick's mind too. In part, that was another symptom of the stubbornness that Hiccup had inherited fully from his dad, their brains were wired the same way in such circumstances and they often collided with the same futility of arguing against a mirror. The big man stood under the doorway, said "Stay with her a moment." and then walked out.

\_Of courseâ€|\_

He started tapping his booted foot's heel on the wall as he leaned on it and looked at the girl. Then he bended to pat the Terrible Terror whose purrs started taking the girl attention away from Toothless. Maybe she really didn't realize there was a dragon so much closer to her. Hiccup took up the green little thing by lifting it below the shoulders, the dragon remained asleep with the pointy tongue lolling from the mouth. Behind the folded wings Hiccup smiled and the girls' wide eyes followed as the mass was lowered on the bed but on the opposite corner.

She stifled a gasp so Hiccup started petting the back of the dragon making the sleepy thing arch and curling up like a colorful pillow. In her curiosity her nose had crossed the knee-line too and was peering with a slowly fading fear to the scene.

"See? And they smell less than dogs too."

Hiccup's mind took a breather and allowed itself to be suddenly outraged.

â€\_How could Dad think That of meâ€| and so immediately! Like I'm prone to kidnap girls for fun! Has he gone mad? Maybe I don't talk much and I disappear on my Island at times but, Come on! People can't start thinking I'm that sort of person just because I keep to myself a bit, can they? \_

\_Come on!\_

A second thought echoed in his mind from afar. Maybe it was the fact that he had spent the night away, Stoick not sleeping at all because he was waiting for him to come home or fearing he'd flown away forever!

\_That would make more senseâ€|\_

Hiccup felt a twinge of guilt and pride and happiness at the thought. Better than the alternative where his father wouldn't care one bit or even thank the Gods for him flying awayâ€ Then he thought about the \_Lecture\_ and veered back to its Outrage status. He didn't care about the night away, he didn't even mention it, for Stoick the main problem was with that stupid Tribe being offendedâ€| Hiccup had carried a Lost; Mute; Mysterious; Girl; from a night adventure away from home and the biggest concern was that he'd not been among the crowd of a sport event. The whole discussion had ended with the meaningful implication of political mingling with the Eldersâ€| that bunch of old preaching mouths of the Meathead Tribe. They needed to be \_told\_ why Dragons are amazing, the idiotsâ€| a child only needs to spot the saddle on their back to understand how amazing they can be. Imagination shouldn't rot with the years but among Vikings that's what happened.

The Tribes had it all wrong in their heads. The Meatheads' Island's vicinity to Berk put them against dragons\_ at times\_ on the sea but their village had not been raided to any Elders' memory and they were ancient people. Nonetheless, their rivalry with the Hairy Hooligans and their propensity to make great show of their stupidity led them to invent the Dragons Duels in which they battled dragons in a makeshift arena \_for Fun\_. The hypocrisy didn't end on their islandâ€¦| most people in every other Tribe had only ever spotted dragons from afar and, in the rare chance they fought them, it was because the beasts were starving and stranded or because they were chained and forced to fight armored warriors so the audience could enjoy a show while drinking ale. The whole tradition of fighting Dragons for a meaningful reason was held only by made-up sagas and the pitiful tales of the small village of Berk. The Elders from every damn village now had found they had a lot to say to Berk because they could not \_envision\_ a world where Dragons were friendsâ€¦| and Hiccup would have gladly kick them in the sea and let them drown for that tooâ€¦| had he not been the one appointed with the silly task to convert themâ€¦|

\_Great plan, Dad.\_

His father came in not long later, a couple of 'mothers' followed him, they had been fetched from the crowd gathering outside. Most females of the tribe have the consistent look of someone ready to arm-wrestle their Chief but the two that entered looked kind enough to refuse any arm-wrestling in favor of a good drunk brawl.

They stared at the girl and their eyes betrayed their appearance with a wisp of softness. They got closer and sat on the bed.

"Why is she so scared?" one of them asked Stoick.

He burbled a "No Idea." and shook his head.

"Do you feel well, dear?" one said feeling her forehead.

"What's your name, honey?" the other asked in a smile.

But as they followed her trembling eyes they noticed how they jumped fast between people but remained obsessively on Toothless perched on the house beam.

The women scowled at both Hiccup and Stoick before they got up and kicked them out the door with the despotic overruling bestowed by motherhood. After a couple of kitchen appliances bashed on his head Toothless, quite startled, followed from the triangular swinging door just under the roof's gable. He jumped down the sill of his personal doorway only after showing his teeth and giving a low growl at the two women inside.

"Yeah, big pouting brat of a Night Fury you are!" said one from inside.

"Stay out all five of you!" said the other as she brought the two Terrible Terrors out by their tails and threw them in the water fountain at the center of the square.

Toothless snorted threateningly at the door but Hiccup reached him andâ€¦| \_sided\_ by him as awareness of the crowd became more than a

reason to flee the place: half the village was there and they were all staring at himâ€|

"You probably haveâ€| your chores to take care of. I've to prepare an announcement for Tonight." said Stoick taking his leave.

"Ohâ€" Hemâ€" Sure." Hiccup said back. He dismissed the '\_announcement' \_clue as having to do with the Meatheads or the Girl, both of which he was planning to stir clear off.

The moment Stoick climbed inside a house, Spitelout Jorgenson's one probably, the Crowd exploded into loud hoots and whoops and whistling, all accompanied by a great deal of laughter.

Hiccup turned red on the spot and froze still.

He had plans for the day. For start being nervous about the Secret of his Island getting out from Astrid and the Girl, then being sad for the whole quarrel with Astridâ€| being angry at his father for several reasons; avoiding the Meatheads and especially Thuggory was on top of the list too; being concentrated on making a proper fuller for the fire sword and being pissed to have to waste an evening walking around Elders that would only spout offenses at him.

As he understood what was happening all those plans turned to spend the rest of the day feeling completely embarrassed and blushed until he could plant his head under dirt and stay there until RagnarÃ¶k.

"You got a girl, huh?" said the first voice to break the ice.

"That's a Viking for yah, catch and run! Ahah!"

"You cheating slouch! You can't go saving princesses from a dragon if you set \_Toothless\_ on them in the first place!"

"Should have heard me when I told your father you are stout mad, you are!"

"Well, better than being nailed to the one that pays better dowry in a month time. The kid's too free for that, I say!"

"Picked her too young, boss!" "Nah! That way she might be fooled he's got any muscles in those scrawny limbs!"

"Gotta hand it to you, that's a clever idea, get a dragon and catch a wife, Ahahah!" "Yeah, weird in three years he's the first to try it yet!"

"One month to the meeting and he goes and catches a fairy, that's a mad man for sure and we'll get him for a chief, hahaha, someone bring ale!"

"Hiccup, you're a fool! It'll turn the tribes red with rage up new moon!"

"Shame on you, young man!" yelled a female quite angrily. Overall Hiccup was not understanding half of what was said but his confidence in public was an undermined trait of his personality built upside

down, like most teenagers. What sounded like pride in the mouths of his fellows turned to shame and embarrassment sooner than his brain could filtrate the words.

"And my husband Onebrow carried me from Terrycow here on a fishing boat that smelled of feet! A dragon in the night! Now that's romance, I tell you!"

"Shut up and bring the Ale, woman, we've got to celebrate!" A gong on the man's horned helmet was followed by his fall, flat on the ground.

"The cheek of the boy! The cheek!"

"Have you thought it through, it'll make a mess at your birthday Hiccup? The chiefs will swing axes when they hear!" This was Fishlegs and Hiccup felt the need to reply "My birthday? Chiefs? What are you talking about?" but it was missed against the wall of unidirectional cheering and blubbing.

"You should have stolen me, Hiccup!" this last one was from Ruffnut.

"Wait! Oh Damn! If Ruffnutt is here!"

The thought melted the crowd and Astrid stood with fiery eyes in front of him but not really in front of him: Fishlegs, Ruffnut, Tuffnut and even someone older were there to buffer and some younger teens in-between were giggling at him. Astrid was keeping away. The day before he had **not** parted with her on kind words and now the rumor had gotten around faster than his legs could. 'First thing in the morning Hiccup brought back a girl!' and what were the chance that the sleepy eyes that spotted the yelling bundle of a girl could have guessed her age right? not one! If they had gotten the right idea they would never dare think! although his father dared! and from the side of the hill Hiccup saw even Thuggory and his gang descending upon him with sneering grins.

Not them! Not now! Oh, who cares about them! " He turned and waded toward Astrid "I've to fix this!"

"Astrid, It's not! She's not! she's a kid! Attacked! On a boat, adri!"

Her stare was more dangerous than a wounded wild dragon would give him but as he stammered reason out of thin words! some other unspoken prayers were being answered in a "Whoosh!" His trained hands responded to the sudden shock the way the would if he was flying, he felt the pull and the world blur around as he gripped ever more tightly the belts of the saddle (which is the sort of instinct one might want to develop quickly while flying on dragons, the alternative being to learn how to land feet first in one's grave). Hiccup took a while to understand why everyone had slid away and the sky had hooked him like a fish! then another jump up and Toothless started his hopping between roofs. They landed on the ground when Hiccup had barely accepted they'd departed from it and Toothless pushed him in the forge with haste, closed the door with a lash of the tail and growled fiercely to everyone that had tried to catch them, then Hiccup heard his thumping and his purring grow louder and angrier as people dispersed in a muffled disappointment.

Secretly thankful but not altogether happy Hiccup sidled gently through the chaos of blunt swords, dropped coal, rusted pokers, crooked bars and everything Gobber felt it fit the atmosphere, then put on his thick leather smock and deliberately sat in the shadows, ready to wait the fuss out, 'Toothless' purring and petulant crowd both.

In the shadow he felt his mind kept walking somewhere far away, quite happy to look for an excuse to daydream. He surrendered to that need and looked up, forlornly, from one of the holes on the roof.

\_Sky and clouds up there, let's not stay here a moment more.\_ Said Hiccup to himself while closing his eyes. He thought a song from way back, when he was a child with a mother.

\_An hammer and a cloud, a wing and a nail, a song for one helmet, to hammer flat the fire, the wind to whet the blade, a cry on the pyre adriftâ€|\_

The old lullaby stopped on the word 'adrift', he could not remember how it continued, he forgot if it had a meaning even and probably the words had changed through him repeating it only on the sound of the words, only his mother knew the words. The lullaby came from far away too, she'd brought it back one of her questsâ€| Hiccup's eyes were heavy and he'd come here with a task but, he thought of the dancing dragons at sunriseâ€| they said that soon it would start raining.

\_I only want a place to hide, I only need a place to sleep.\_

Damp on the breath, wet on the skin, silent to the ear, the eyes still closed.

Under his feet Hiccup felt the dewy grass and that was \_unusual\_, hard to pinpoint why though. The mist flooded down from atop the hill but veered around him and drew the boundaries of \_his\_ patch of land. He felt like a conqueror for his dominion five feet across in every directionâ€| was that a \_proper\_ appraisal? He was not sure, it might have been a big territory for a snail probably, he wasn't a snail though, he was almost sure of that.

The place itself was sneaking doubts in his veins and cold breeze in his mind, he felt his nose burn and shut down, his eyes itch to be closed. He closed them. Then he started rubbing them and he kept going for so long that his eyeballs might have been ground flat. Slowly he opened them to a different sight, the mist was slowly receding, firstly in its thickness but also by thinning on the diverging rivers and their shores. Hiccup's land would soon grow farther than five feet around!

For a while there was nothing that jumped to attention even though he tried looking all around, seeking spots where the fog was clearing faster. Then he spotted a shape that looked like a tall bush with two protruding branches despoiled of leaves from the incoming winter. His feet dragged him and he started stumbling on what crunched, sometimes squelched, sometimes even cricked broken like bone through skin, which, as it turned out was literally accurateâ€|

'Shadows' had been slain in this meadow and they looked like people, hands too thin, muscles too untrained, faces bulging in despair and

terror and all enveloped in a blurry darkness. Too many indistinct figures were shaping, in Hiccup's imagination, like women, children and old people. A slaughter of shadowsâ€”and none of it wanted to give away more than its darkness or its outline. Hiccup noticed the only standing shape around him, it was not a bush nor a tree as he first thought, it was \_Someone\_ although a second glance made him wonder if '\_Someone\_' applied to the situation.

\_Of course it does NOT! It might represent Someone, probably, it isn't itself a Someone.\_

The thought sprinted clear in his mind and once again he tried to quell the confusion that made everything look like a conspiracy meant to arm him. This place felt definitely sinister.

The figure in question was hooded black, scrawny and tall, taller than any man in Berk, in fact it might even be taller than any man Hiccup had ever met. Besides, it was not a man, strictly speaking, his head was a skull of aâ€”

â€”an overgrown sheep perhaps? \_

Hard to tell, there were animals far away from Berk, he'd heard of horses among many other but it was impossible to tell from a skull if the thing would actually fit the sketchy descriptions he'd heard in tales. The skull had great big horns that sprouted up and drew back and spread a bit on the sides as if two fat drawn bows had impaled its forehead. The horns alone were as tall as the thing was from feet to the tip of its skull, they effectively doubled its height toward the sky. All around its body the breeze was making something else clear, what looked like a dark hood was just a mass of small pearly black feathers, they hang by the figure like a hood and they only let a scrawny hand of bone appear holding a blunt and chipped short sword in it.

\_Fancy!\_

The mist was gulping out of sight at speed but irregularly. A big greasy sleeve cleared the sky in a brushstroke and allowed the horizon to appear through it. It was so that Hiccup saw the sea shore far away sooner than he saw ten feet ahead of him. There were mountains on all sides, they grew big and tedious in the haziness but were painted a deep green and gave a sense of peace, the small patch of water was a long wispy tongue of it that slithered among two long headlands, the only reason Hiccup believed it to be a sea at all was the way it disappeared vast in the horizon.

Hiccup's first steps were uncertain but other silhouettes were starting to take shape all around and he had decided to ignore altogether the big dark figure. For all he knew the thing might just be some kind of scarecrow made of raven's feathers or the effigy of a God unknown to himâ€”someone had probably stitched the feathers, planted a pole for the the long cow skull and nailed the horns of some unknown dragon on its head. Nodding approvingly to himself for such logic explanation he walked up hill and met the crumbled remains of a house.

The fog still hung by his feet and the house protruded like rocks on a low tide of the white frothy sea. The roof had been felled by a huge impact, a crater still left with a pool of mist in its center,

fire had eaten the edges but rain had probably stopped it from spreading. Other two dead shadows were there, close to its splintered walls. The more Hiccup looked at those the more their faces lost the darkness that hid them, they looked so humanlike, so pitiful.

Hiccup was starting to feel his lingering doubts taking shape into a belief,

'\_this feels like a Dream, a nightmare evenâ€|'\_

â€|and his heart beat faster in his chest, the distress, the fear was building up to a sense of despair he was not ready to handle. He turned around and spotted another dark figure clothed in feathers and giant horns over its skull, this had short swords in both bony hands and was looking at the two bodies by the house too, the skull stooped a bit forward to see them cleared from his sloped position.

\_Didn't I notice Him standing right there? 'Him' ? 'IT'! It's an 'IT'! not a 'him'! Is It a different one orâ€| the same? Did it move?\_

Hiccup backed toward the sea and downward through the steep ground. He kept his eyes on the dark figure but, to his discomfort, his feet seemed to find every darn corpse they could trod uponâ€|

â€|\_or maybe there are so many They've paved the street with them?\_

He wasn't sure what he even meant by \_They \_but someone had to have killed all these people. The thought made him shudder, turn and speed up to the nearest boat. Only one remained in port, fat in shape and with its prow broken, the sails hung by luck alone because the mast was burned and cutâ€| overall an unusual ship indeed and yet his memory ringed in recognition. The prow's head was not a dragon at all, maybe a serpent? The emblem too, he knew that one, three serpents and an Axe. Where had he seen it?

The heart was calming itself, the fact he had recognized something familiar in what had been so far a blind walk outside reality, understandably, was giving Hiccup newfound hope. A rustling and clinking much like wooden wind chimes made him turn. The figure in dark feathers was at his side and was looking at the ship.

\_How fast did he move?\_

He was still moving, in fact, one hand had lost its sword and its bony fingers tapped on its chin.

Click-Click-Click

His hollow sockets for eyes were fixated on the wooden pier, hard to tell where though. Hiccup handled the discovery of a sentient being with an empty skull for a head very atypically, like only dreams can allow to. He felt reassured instead of scared, whatever that \_Thing\_ was Hiccup was not alone anymore in this graveyard.

He followed the general stare and walked up between empty traders' stalls and open crates of rotten fish, some of these showed signs of being half-eaten but anything that could have done the eating probably flew or slithered away with the fog. The silence was

deafening. Hiccup felt himself being an ominous and dreadful presence in the peaceful quietness all around.

He stepped ahead and saw a large black smudge sliding on the ground behind a planked wall. The smudge had consistency and redness in some spots, it looked like coagulated blood but could a man shed so much blood? He turned very slowly behind the corner and glimpsed down the underwhelming sight, a wing, a black dragon wing, one of Hiccup's eyebrows lifted with disappointment. He expected some gory stuffâ€¦ he thought of Toothless but just by association, the scales were all wrong, the color was opaque and the shape was more fitted to fat slow dragons than to lean fast ones. And that was it, only a wing, where was the dragon's corpse if there was any? Without a wing how would it fly away? Maybe something ate the rest or the body fell in the sea and the waves rocked him away from shore. It was hard to tell but, if one thing could be guessed, the place had been attacked, ravaged, pillaged and destroyed by dragons. He wandered back, faster on his feetâ€¦ \_\*\*Feet!\*\*\_

\_Of course! I have both of them but I don't! It is a dreamâ€¦|\_

The world rocked under the realization and he could barely stand straight, he was going to wake up if he lingered on that thought. He shook his head and reached for the figure. Now the certainty gave him courage to say something to the skull, no drawbacks. As he came to a halt in front of him the figure craned his neck, if he had one, the horns loomed on Hiccup's head and that prompted an awkward smile directed to the empty sockets inside the skull.

\_Still scary as hell and it's no mask. There really is no one inside.  
\_

Maybe Hiccup gave him a look that betrayed his thoughts but the sockets immediately started filling with two round white eyes. It was like seeing milk gurgling in two walnut-sized bubbles, glinting and reflecting lights that weren't around them. There was no shape of a pupil whatsoever but Hiccup felt stared at, even beneath his skin, those eyes were reaching far deeper than bare exterior, they were more at home with the meat and the bones below, there was some wondering if the stare was tying a knot in his throat because there were several gulps before any word was spoken.

"Hem, hello, do you know where we are?"

That was \_\*\*not\*\*\_ the question he had been thinking of. As a matter of fact he had already deemed the question useless because dreamlands are not found on maps.

The skull paused, then assessed him down to his feet. This made Hiccup swing back his neck to fit in-between the descending horns. When the head whipped back up and Hiccup found himself straight up again the eyes drained away and the empty sockets were once again pools of darkness. The figure snapped his fingers and turned all around with the same slowness that seemed to suit him whenever someone was looking at him. All the shadows creaked alive and started standing up with such fluidity that even living bodies would not match its flow. They detached like veils and, in their wake, the corpses became very clear. They were people and all were dead. Hiccup felt his stomach unsettle, his hands tremble, his head spinâ€¦|



The figure leaned again and put up his hand palm up. It looked more like a bony sifter than a palm. It was soon understood he wanted his action mirrored, he had something to give. In response Hiccup rubbed his hands on the pants to dry the sweatâ€|

â€|\_why even sweat if it's a dreamâ€|\_

The world quaked again at that thought but Hiccup steadied his hand. Was he going to give him one of those two short swords he had been handing before? Despite the knowledge that everything was a dream there was desire in Hiccup's mind, the blades looked mystical, powerful, fated.

The figure, instead, plucked a feather from his great coat, it didn't look any more special than the thousands more that adorned it, and let it fall in Hiccup's palm. The skull's bare jaw came unclenched for the first time and a deep rumbling laughter, a maddening sound, shook everything once, twice, then again and again until every color smudged the others and they all merged in the darkâ€|

â€|Hiccup woke up in a spasm, hands cupped to cover a ponderous sneeze that felt like a shower of smoke. He opened his eyes and they stung like hell. It took a while but between narrow eyelids he saw his palms and they were full of dark ashes.

\_The feather?\_

The dream was still incredibly vivid and he could not stop the horrifying laughter ringing in his ears. He closed his eyes but felt very awakeâ€| the word '\_awake\_' can't even begin to describe how he felt. The dream had felt beyond real, he still felt his other foot on the ground while knowing it wasn't there. The air smelled of damp death and he felt the weight of every body he'd trod upon like they had risen to hang onto his boots. The laughter had plunged him into life once again and he felt it in the bones, Hiccup had been banished by the land itself, he could not walk it yet, while he was alive that is. The contrast between the two lands had made life glitter with presence, he felt the importance in every breath, the pressure of every soul he could imagine in the village, he felt his sores and was glad of the pain, he was becoming aware of everything and he could not say it didn't matter. It mattered most, it mattered too much and he could not shut it down.

Again the contrast played with his mind and . Astrid, the girl, his fatherâ€| in one day he'd managed to make blatantly obvious how he'd been making old mistakes anew and it only took a stroll in the land of the dead to understand it all. There he was, his naive young self, hiding his dragon best friend while acting like a dragon slayer in the village. At the time he could only react to things until his castle of sand was broken in one single action in the arenaâ€| did he learn nothing? For two years he had kept his aspirations and his own thoughts a secret the same way he had done before. He had pushed his father far enough that they could not be completely honest towards each other, he even started resenting him for being proud of his son, something Hiccup had yearned for his whole life. Why not just tell him?

And Astridâ€| he should have told her a long time ago. It was a leap of trust he had not felt taking but the gorge between them had only widened from that decision. At the time he told himself he would ask

Astrid to come along in his voyage, that Berth-Cup island had to remain a secret so he could make special gifts for her, that he'd propose her as the next chief. Those were lies and delusions he told himself to quell the guilt of lies, if only by omission.

The girl had brought the nightmare itselfâ€¦ he didn't need to ask where he was, all those dead peopleâ€¦ he was walking the land of the stranded girl, the way he imagined it would be, full of death and nothing else. One of the many possible fates he had imagined she was coming from. Then his mind had taken advantage of a little nap and turned a thought into \_That\_. Where did the Skull head come from, he had no idea. He could hide from her like he'd decided to and leave the rest to his father and the people of the Village. Orâ€¦ he could act upon the conscience already writhing in his sleep and find where she came fromâ€¦

His eyes closed and drenched in awareness, Hiccup listened. Then he open his eyes and looked aroundâ€¦

\_Black ashes in my hands?\_

Well, he was in the forge after all.

\_The laughter?\_

\_Gobber! \_

The big blacksmith figure was there in the same room to Hiccup's surprise, the illusion of being aware of everything had not been really that effective since it failed to perceive the hulking bear of a man sit on a stool, cleaning his nails, a screeching accompanying every sway on the seat. Awkwardly embarrassed Hiccup cleaned his hands on the legs and thought that, this time, he wasn't drying sweat to pick up a dark feather from a Mystical Nightmare. On a hunch he looked around for \_that\_ black feather butâ€¦

\_Nope. Nothing of the sort, dreams are still well walled within my head.\_

Gobber stood up and trod to the coals, lighting the hearth and chuckling merrily.

"Yah sleepin' there, all hunched up and sneezy, whatch'u've been up to, eh, Hiccup? Heard you got \_engaged\_." he said like the word was pompous talk for noble people, not quite fitting his workplace and his apprentice description.

"\_Tripe\_ idiocy. I'm not marrying anyone." Hiccup answered.

"Ah really? I thought you went and done it out of spite, yah know, 'cause your father's gonna stick you up to some chap's daughter at your birthday."

"Hm?"

"Yeah, he sent \_missives\_ to all tribes to gather here next moon or around that. Everyones' bringing some daughter or niece with the right blood, it's gonna be fun, we'll run out of ale but they'll bring some if they don't drink it all to get it. Can't get fast 'nough though, the winter'll be upon us as a slap on your heinie. Yah

know, you carrying the winter with your first cry wasn't a good sign when you got bornâ€¦ according to the Elders of course. Now all tribes are gonna risk hail and ice just for the \_privilege\_ of marrying into your family, ain't that a quip? The village all know already, kinda fun how that plan broke. Word got around fast enough even with you nowhere and your father on tight lips to flaunt the story next chance he got you in front of people."

\_Dad organized a damn Summit with the Tribes to marry him at my birthdayâ€¦|\_

Hiccup mind raced to put together that jigsaw puzzle, then he spoke very slowly more to himself than to Gobber "Of course and the \_Races\_ yesterday were to tell everyoneâ€¦|"

â€¦|\_and drunk people of Berk in a crowd holding a juicy secretâ€¦| like that lasted long! If Dad had plans to reach the tribes he'd have to at least include someone with a readable handwriting, someone with a diplomatic way with words, a ship was probably already sailing through the harsh currents of the South that led East, a ship loaded with dragons and riders to reach everyone in time. A Nightmare!\_

Hiccup's thoughts ran while rage boiled just below. His drumming heartbeat was not shaking his newfound lucidity but it certainly was proving quite a challenge. The reason why Astrid had decided to reach his island yesterday, less of a coincidence and more of a looming doomâ€¦| it couldn't have been long in preparations, you couldn't keep a secret in Berk for longer than a week if more than a soul knew about it.

Gobber apparently was treading a similar venue "Right you are! I should have known you'd sneak around and eavesdrop on someone and learn before your pa' hollered it to everyone! You got me off my bet, Hiccup! I'd gambled you'd fly away as soon as you heard but you never flew in, hahaha. You little mongoose! No one got to say it out loud but we all a wee bit drunk and couldn't stop talking of itâ€¦| you should have seen everyone in the whole racket you made this morning but we all bit tired, got close to see the sun rise before getting home myself. But sure, I bet you like it better that way, right? Stealing a lass yourself and all. Thought it would be Astrid though, and away on Vinlâ€¦" Ah! What do I know!"

"I seeâ€¦|" Hiccup stood up slowly. He had a smile completely devoid of mirth, the dream had been too glum and real, its feelings still lingered in his chest even after detaching its sights. The rage drowned in his calm and took the shake of a seaqueake, calling for waves of heights and launching Hiccup towards the door.

"What about, eh?" Gobber said trying to dodge the fierce steps towards him,

"Nothing important really, apparently the whole village knows I'm to be wed except me."

"Uh? You didn't know? Whoopsâ€¦| Can't you just forget I said it?"

"I don't think so." Hiccup open the door with a bang.

"Uhâ€¦"Ohâ€¦|" echoed Gobber from the forge.

Hiccup ignored Toothless, sleepy and serene, he spotted the noonday sun in the sky and Thuggory in the way, sitting on a dragon roost with his gang. Hiccup immediately ducked behind a house, slipping in a small path between rocky island and wooden walls and used his lankiness to squeeze through unnoticed. He was really very clear in his mind. Deep inside he wanted to go there and just shout back at his father for doing such a stupid thing and then follow by doing something very stupid indeed just to prove how deranged had he been to start the whole chain reaction in the first place. If his father knew him at all that's all he had to expect from him: petty retaliation!

Nonetheless he felt very in the moment and saw the stupidity of reacting by anger alone. Anything he would do might just trigger consequences of greater magnitude than intended and in all directions, a summit with all tribes was the sort of things that could precipitate into anything, really, war being very high in the list of easily foresighted futures.

Hiccup voluntarily took a step back in his mind and tried to understand what was that he wanted. He felt awful the more he wondered with cold rationality about the issues: he realized that he actually had nothing strong against the meetings among Tribes nor of an arranged marriage. Yes, he liked Astrid and felt like it was a requited feeling but had he ever taken a step that Astrid hadn't pulled or pushed him into? He wasn't sure he had, even when he took her on her first flight, which was his biggest gesture towards her ever, he had not done it out of love but to right something he felt was wrong with everyone in the village. He worked long on anything he wanted to gift her butâ€¦ would the meeting affect them? If he loved her he'd just come out and say and that was the policy he wanted to act upon, at least for a while. After their recent fight Hiccup felt his hopes frozen but maybe there really was some kind of bizarre love blossoming between them. He'd have to chance it.

As for the Tribes' meeting and his father expectationsâ€¦ he had no answer for that either but he knew he had to come clean to his father about his intentions. He felt those decisions would come burdened by regrets any way he'd take them but there was one thing he was certain of, he wanted to be true to the dream he'd worked for the last couple of years.

He wanted to see the world, up to J rmungandr's scaly ends! He was stubborn and reckless and selfish sometimes but his faulty personality had left him with a Dragon best friend and with a victory in a duel with the Biggest Dragon ever seen. He could afford to be stubborn and stupid once again, he needed to tell his father his intentions but not how far away he wanted to go, that would just make him worry worse than ever.

\_He'll be all grouchy now but in a few days he'll be happy I haven't just run away without a wordâ€¦\_

And if he left in the evening he'd be back by the time of the meetingâ€¦

â€¦\_One month is quite enough! The world can't be \_\_\*\*that\*\*\_\_ big on the back of a dragon!\_

His home ten feet ahead, Hiccup saw the girl playing with two children, trying to catch a long strip of cloth the two dragged in the wind while running around the square. The girlâ€| her villageâ€| He thought about the nightmare, the bodies in the mist, the dead paralyzed in masks of terror, the skull boomed another laugh in his mind, his legs stopped, his fists clenched and his eyes closed shutâ€|

Just a dream. Just a dream. Just a dream.

He opened his eyes still standing still, the image of the black feather remained ghostly clear when he stared at his dirty palms and he wondered if the dark figure was actually wearing nothing but his own wings and not, in fact, a cloak of feathers. Maybe he had flown away as soon as Hiccup had sneezed himself awake, the thought brought a sad smile. He thought of the dead laying around and, again, of the ashes in his palm that he had blown in his eyes, blinding himself. It gave him no courage at all but it left him with a thought to dispel, something to leave behind and, thusly, a reason to move ahead. Back in his home to tell his father he was going away.

[illegible]

Notes (someone might wonders):

**\*\*Eagled Empire? Romans? Are you kidding me?\*\*** " This universe is different, a butterlizard flapped her wings millions of years ago and it evolved Dragons and Mythical Gods, can't expect the dates to match your history books now, can we?

**\*\*That's not the Meatheads from the books!\*\***   â€œ Right, people that are NOT in movies always look different when you meet them. Everyone knows that.

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**Too many OCs!** _ (preemptive strike for when Hiccup leaves Berk)_
â€" They're not OCs, Hiccup just had no chance to meet them beforeâ€"
_*wink*wink*_
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**\*\*Grammar, Fix it! \*\***â€œ It is in your powers to send me a message about it, among Skalds I'm of the grateful kind.

End  
file.